

## To Dwell On Dreams

"There is no reality, only perception." - Dr Phil McGraw

### Chapter One - Through The Looking Glass

Harry held that morning's edition of the Daily Profit numbly in his hands:

Infamous Black Recaptured Ministry Officials confirmed today that Sirius Black, the only known escapee from Azkaban Prison, is once again secure in the Ministry's custody. One source told press representatives that the Department of Magical Law Enforcement received an anonymous tip-off regarding Black's whereabouts a number of days previous to his finding and subsequent arrest. In 1981 Black was sentenced to life imprisonment for thirteen counts of first degree murder; his escape on July 15th 1993 will undoubtedly result in further sentencing, but as to what that might entail, the Ministry has so far refused to comment.

The clock on the wall had long since struck midnight, but Harry, Ron and Hermione were still sitting in the Gryffindor common room, just as they had been doing for most of that day. Of all the emotions that had passed through Harry's mind in the last few hours, he was now left with just one: total and utter despair. All the shock, anger, and disbelief had gradually ebbed away to reveal the simple truth - Sirius was as good as dead and there was nothing Harry could do about it. They had first heard about the arrest early that morning, when the post had arrived as usual halfway through breakfast. It wasn't just Hermione who got the Daily Prophet delivered on top of her toast however, and almost instantly the shouting and cheering had started as people shared the 'good' news with one another. Curious, Hermione had shaken the paper open. Just as quickly as the celebrating had started all colour evaporated from her face. "No," she'd whispered hoarsely, "Oh God no, please no!" Seamus Finnigan had begun to ask if Hermione was alright, when the paper dropped from her hands, knocking the pumpkin juice flying, and she had promptly burst into tears. When Harry tried to remember what happened over the next few

moments, everything seemed to go in slow motion. Ron had gingerly put his arm round Hermione's shoulders, asking what on Earth was wrong whilst looking quizzically over to where Harry sat. Other Gryffindors, and even students from the other tables were looking in their direction wondering what was happening. Dean Thomas had lent over to pick up the Prophet from where it had fallen. When he saw the cover story he had frowned uncertainly; "But isn't that good news?" he'd asked Seamus, puzzled, before passing the paper to Harry. At first, Harry had simply not understood the headline - the words just didn't make sense. Then slowly, very slowly, he realised. "Sirius." Ron, being so tall, had been able to read the story easily over Hermione. Without saying anything, he had gently lifted Hermione to her feet, taken Harry firmly by the arm, and steered them both out of the Hall.

Harry had to say, looking back on it, he was impressed with Ron's composure. He'd sat them down at the base of the stairway in the main entrance; saying nothing, most likely as there was nothing that could be said - just simply letting them be. Hermione had shuddered against him, whilst he in turn had put his arm round Harry's shoulders. He was so cold.

They'd sat like that until people had started spilling out of the Great Hall. Here they'd had to get up hastily, in the hope that onlookers wouldn't start asking awkward questions, and began making their own way reluctantly to lessons. To add insult to injury, first period on a Wednesday morning was Potions. Harry, Ron and Hermione had had to endure Snape's silky taunts for almost two hours, until Ron had finally snapped, earning himself an hour long detention scraping caterpillar entrails off school chopping boards and a smart twenty points from Gryffindor. The other Gryffindors may have been patiently annoyed at this (even if Ron was upset about something, twenty points was still twenty points) and Malfoy and his Slytherin cronies had found it most amusing, but Harry for his part had been extremely grateful; Ron's support was one of the only high points of what turned out to be a long and miserable day. When they had arrived for Care of Magical Creatures, Hagrid had

mercifully told them that they were to be excused from the remaining lessons that day, on orders straight from Dumbledore. Harry was glad, he had personally felt none of them could take much more of the Slytherins and their snide remarks about Ron's delicate temperament. He was also encouraged by the fact that Dumbledore seemed to be involved - he might at least be able to do something for Sirius' defence.

So after that they'd made their way to the Gryffindor common room and there they'd stayed. The other 5th Years, along with most students in fact, had been wise enough to steer clear of the fireplace that Harry, Ron and Hermione were sitting next to. Colin and Dennis Creevey though, had come over twice to see if Harry was okay. The second time Ron seemed close to snapping again, but Hermione was able to lead them tactfully away saying it was a personal problem and Harry really wanted to be left alone. Now however, the room was empty. The last few students had drifted off to bed taking their questions about Harry with them. Their star seeker, crumbling like old chalk? And was it really something to do with Sirius Black.?

"Harry," Hermione said gently, easing the Daily Prophet out of his hands, "he's only in custody at the moment, there's still time." Her eyes were smudged and red, but as always, was now falling back on logic to comfort herself. "The Dementors abandoned Azkaban months ago, all they can do is lock Sirius up—" "There are plenty of ways to execute someone Hermione," Harry interrupted emptily, "not just a Dementor's Kiss." Hermione didn't have anything to say to that. Ron took the paper from her and looked at Sirius' mug shot - it was just as dead and hollow as ever. Sirius didn't actually look like that any more, but the Ministry wouldn't care about that. "But who?" Ron wondered out loud, "who could have known where to find him?"

Harry looked out of the window where a thunder storm was raging. Forks of lightning pierced an inky sky; the yellow and gold webbed across his view of the grounds - it was haunting and so violent. "Does it matter?" he burst out savagely. He stood up and went over to the window; his wand grasped so tightly in his hand he was in danger of breaking it. "Whether it was Lucius Malfoy or Winky, they're still going to kill him. You know the Ministry's not going to be any

more interested in the word of three teenage wizards now than they were two years ago, and Cornelius Fudge has made it blatantly clear he and Dumbledore are no longer even on speaking terms, let alone willing to listen open-mindedly to one another." "But there must be something we can do," implored Hermione, "Harry, you can't just give up, you never give up, and this is Sirius we're talking about." Her words trailed off. She could probably see the hopelessness of the situation as well as any of them. "I'll send an owl to my Dad," Ron suggested, "he'll be able to help us, wont he?" Hermione nodded in agreement, "I mean, maybe at the very least he can work out some way we can talk with Sirius—" Harry spun round suddenly and started walking towards the portrait entrance. "I have to go," he announced. And he did.

As the portrait of the Fat Lady swung shut she called after Harry; "you shouldn't be out at this time of night," but Harry ignored her. He half expected Ron and Hermione to come running down the corridor after him, but they seemed to have realised he wanted to be alone. Or it might have been that they didn't want to end up shackled to the wall in one of Filch's dungeons, Harry wasn't sure. He was however sure that he himself didn't even remotely care about being caught out of bed at night. It really wasn't important. Harry had half a mind to go to Dumbledore's office but he knew it would be a wasted visit - the headmaster was already doing all he could about Sirius; Harry's presence wouldn't achieve anything. He therefore seemed to be twisting and turning aimlessly around the castle just trying to figure out his thoughts. One of which was to think how ironic it was that the only time he'd chosen to go out at night with neither his Invisibility Cloak nor Marauder's Map there appeared to be a severe lack of teachers around to catch him doing it. Suddenly Harry stopped in his tracks; the door he had just walked past looked oddly familiar but he couldn't explain why. Automatically he backtracked his steps and went into the room. Oh.

That was why. This was the old History of Magic classroom Professor Lupin and he had used in Harry's third year to practice the patronus spell in. It looked just the same as before; old desks and chairs piled up against the walls, a dusty chalkboard Peeves had a liking for scribbling rude words on and a number of torches opposite the windows that

probably hadn't been used since Harry's last visit here. But Harry didn't take much of this in. His memories of this room were sharp, raw and painful. Dementors.

"Lily, take Harry and go! It's him!"  
"It's the fate that awaits Sirius Black. The Ministry have given the Dementors permission to perform it if they find him."  
"Not Harry! Not Harry! Please - I'll do anything!"  
"He deserves it!"  
"Not Harry, please no, take me, kill me instead!"  
"He deserves it!"  
"Stand aside, you silly girl!"  
"HE DESERVES IT!"

BANG!

Without even thinking Harry had thrown one of the chairs into the wall on the left. He didn't care who he woke up, all he could hear was the blood throbbing through his head. He picked up another one.

SMACK!

That was Cornelius Fudge for being so pig ignorant.

SMACK!

Draco Malfoy. Lucius Malfoy.

CRASH!

For Cedric.

CRACK!

Crabbe, Goyle, McNair.

The throbbing in his head had now turned into a banging of its very own Harry snatched his wand from out of his robes and pointed it at a table. "WORMTAIL!" Harry yelled at the top of his lungs as the table flew off the ground and smashed through the window, spraying shards of glass in every direction.

An incredible flash of lightening filled the sky, thunder shook the walls of the castle, the wind howled, swirled, swept up around Harry and split the night.

And then quite suddenly, everything was black.

Harry's whole body ached. He felt like he was spinning, or falling; or maybe both? His fingers tingled, his eyes were dry and his head was still pounding. He got the impression he was lying down. Yes, he was definitely in a bed, and he could feel someone's hand on his forehead - what was happening?

"Harry?"

Oh, now he remembered what he'd been doing - was he still in the classroom though?

"Harry?"

That was a girl's voice. "Hermione?"  
"Erm, no."

Slowly, Harry found he could open his eyes; everything was fuzzy. "Glasses?" he managed to utter, his head felt like it was home to a heard of rather angry Hippogriffs. The girl, who seemed to be perched on the side of his bed, reached over to a bedside cabinet presumably for Harry's glasses. She had red hair. "Ginny?" he tried again.

She laughed; "who are all these girls in your life Harry?" She slipped his glasses on.

It was his mother.

"Mum?"

Lily Potter smiled and pushed Harry back down in his bed. "You gave us quite a fright there Harry, passing out like that. Could do with a bit of a warning next time - you were this close to drowning in your lasagne and ruining you hair. I'm not too sure which would have been worse." She grinned.

It had to be a trick. Some sick joke of Voldemort's, or even Wormtail's; though Harry doubted Petigrew was clever enough to pull something like this off. Whatever it was Harry knew it couldn't be real. Impulsively he tried to get up. Pulling the bed covers back he swung his legs around to stand up, catching a look at his clothes as he did. They were very different to what he normally wore. For one thing they actually fitted instead of being three sizes too large, but they were also, well, nice. The only other person Harry had seen wearing clothes like this was Draco Malfoy, so they naturally must have been expensive.

"Er, Harry, you've been out cold for hours, jumping up and down might not be wise." Lily tried to pull him back down again, Harry snatched his arm away.

"What the Hell is going on," he snapped standing up and backing away. The bedroom swayed violently, he probably was too dizzy to be up but he didn't care. "Two minutes ago I was in the common room with Hermione and Ron and now."

"You were where with who?" his mother interrupted.

"Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley," Harry elaborated, though why he was explaining things to an apparition he wasn't quite sure. "Harry, that's not funny," Lily said quietly, her eyes dropping to his bed spread. "The Weasley's were a good family, you shouldn't say things like that."

"Were?" repeated Harry dryly. He sat back down on the bed. Everything looked so real.

"Can you do something for me," he said in a quiet voice, "no matter how weird I may sound, can you answer some questions for me?" His mother looked sympathetic and worried, perhaps she really wasn't a dream. he realised she was nodding so he went on. "The Weasleys. what - er - happened to them?" At this she seemed confused and quite distressed, but answered all the same. "They were murdered by You Know Who about six years ago - you went to the ceremony. Harry, are you feeling alright?" Something very nasty seemed to plummet in Harry's stomach. This dream- world was becoming more of a nightmare every minute. Not Ron?

Surely?

Harry took a deep breath.

"Why - why aren't I at school?"

"Hogwarts, but Harry?"

"Please," he implored, "please answer."

"Well, it was closed, three years ago this March -"

"Why," Harry interrupted before he could help himself. He knew he was probably sounding pretty crazy to her with his new and exciting amnesia, but he didn't care, he had to work out what was happening. Lily was looking out of the window; it was early afternoon, trees with brown and orange leaves were swaying in the garden.

"I don't know why you've brought this up all of a sudden Harry, but I'll tell you if you want, I know your head must be felling funny, collapsing like that." He nodded, so sighing she went on. "It was three years ago. You Know Who managed to penetrate the defences at Hogwarts, we think he was looking for Severus Snape, but it could easily have been Susan Bones or. anyway, since they'd all gone into hiding it didn't matter. You Know Who was livid, out of shear spite he killed the Longbottom's son and a good few others before Dumbledore could reach him in the Great Hall. They duelled for hours. Eventually You Know Who was driven back to wherever it was he went, but Dumbledore was left extremely weak." She paused, probably considering why she was explaining her son's

life history to himself, but the desperate look on Harry's face seemed to convince her enough to continue. "I guess after that it just didn't seem safe to keep the school open, everyone was sent home and we've done our best at home-schooling ever since; I mean, they'd closed the school to Muggle-Borns ages ago, closing it completely was inevitable at some point."

Harry's mind seemed blank, totally devoid of all thought. Wherever he had found himself to be, it was a place where Voldemort had never been defeated, where Ron had been murdered, but how could that be.?

Harry stood up again, this time making sure his footing was secure before going across to the other side of the room where a mirror hung next to a grand oak wardrobe. Without thinking Harry placed himself in front of the mirror and lifted his fringe.

There was no scar.

Behind him he could hear his 'mother' saying something about his fever having gone already, but he wasn't listening. He knew. This was real. Everything; the blue curtains that clashed with the carpet, the dirty clothes under his bed, his Firebolt propped up next to his desk, which in turn was littered with Herbology text books and past issues of 'Loaded' magazine. No scar. It was real. He could feel it. He turned round slowly and went back to sit on the bed with his mother. She looked like the wedding photos, the pictures at the beach, graduation, but older. She smelled faintly of butter he noticed, her nails were all different lengths and her jeans were slightly worn at the knees.

"Sorry," he offered through dry lips, "my head was spinning, y'know? I feel better now." Lily gave him a tired smile. "I'm not going to rule out shipping you off to St. Mungo's, but if you feel hungry I can get you something; an empty stomach probably won't be helping the crazy talk." Harry nodded gratefully, so she left, shaking her head, presumably to go down to the kitchen. Harry wasn't too sure where he'd landed, or how exactly he'd got himself there, but whining about it probably wasn't going to get him very far. Maybe the best thing would be just to accept the situation and move on - find his own way to get back home - that would be the kind of thing Hermione would do.

Ron, however, would want to check out the shelf near the window covered in shields and trophies; the ones with Harry's name on them.

So Harry (naturally listening to Ron's advice) slid off the bed and made his way over to where they were glinting in the sunlight: Player of the Year 1989, Under 11s Squad Team Captain, Award for Outstanding Achievement 1994 - these all seemed to be from a local Quidditch club called the Darby Green Dynamos. The one that interested Harry the most however was a relatively large silver trophy standing in the middle of the shelf with a gold medal on purple ribbon draped over the handles. On the cup were inscribed the words:

England	Under	15s	Squad			
International	Quidditch		Association			
Annual	Play-Offs		1995			
Second			Place			
Whereas	the	back	of	the	medal	said:
Most	Promising		Seeker,	Harry	Potter	
IQA,						1995

"Wow," said Harry softly. He'd always loved flying, and there was no denying that Gryffindor currently (to him anyway) had the best side they'd had in years - after all, they had only lost one match in all the time Harry had played with them, and that wasn't even his fault. But this, this was. "Wow," he said again.

"Ah," said Lily, re-entering the room with a plate, "looking at that again are you, you can't have hit your head too hard. Do you have any idea how long that thing takes to polish?" She was pretending to sound annoyed, but when Harry turned round she was smiling.

"Those damn Italians hay, but we'll whip them at the Under 16s I bet. I got you a corned beef sandwich by the way, how's that sound?" Before he could answer there was a bang of a door downstairs and a voice cried; "Hey! Is anyone home?"

Lily put his sandwich down on his desk, "I guess that'll be your dad," she said cheerfully, and went out to great him. Harry however had gone week at the knees. His dad? Slowly, breathing deeply, he made his way to his door and out to the landing. Their house was obviously big - a number of doors led off in various directions and there was a second flight of stairs leading upwards. Clinging to the banister, Harry took one step at a time downstairs, barely noticing all the photos that adorned the wall he was walking next to. As he turned the corner in the middle of the flight, Harry saw him standing at the foot of the stairs.

James Potter. His Father.

"Hey you! How's your head?" James called out cheerily, pulling off his

gloves. Harry's knees finally gave way in response and he sat down sharply on the step. "Ah, that good hey?" Concern crossed over both his parents' faces again, but Harry quickly assured them that he was actually feeling much better, just a little light-headed still. He didn't want them fussing. Maybe there really was someone, some being out there that had decided to give him this second chance at his life. Whatever the case, Harry wanted to make the most of it whilst it lasted. They walked down the corridor a little further to a closet where James proceeded to hang his coat. Harry knew they were talking about him, but he didn't care. He was watching them intently - his parents. His father, his mother; they were standing right there. How long had he been wishing, dreaming for this moment - all those hours in that cupboard, lying awake at night, willing to hear the sounds of their voices, feel the touch of their skin. Harry felt he should say something more important, more momentous, but he couldn't think of anything. Something was better than nothing. "So, er, where you been?" Harry asked his father, thinking about getting off the steps, then deciding better of it. He wasn't really too sure how to talk with his parents, after all they were nothing like the Dursleys, and he had only occasionally spoken so casually with Sirius. Sirius! With a pang of guilt Harry realised he'd almost forgotten about Sirius. What had become of his godfather in this world he wondered?

"Me and Sarah went to chuck the Quaffle around for a bit," said James, "her aim's getting much better y'know," he added to Lily, whilst Harry considered who Sarah might be. He didn't have to wait long for an answer; a moment later a young girl with long black hair tied behind her head walked through the archway from the living room. She wore a forest green cloak and was pulling off a pair of Quidditch gloves - the fingerless kind Harry himself wore. "Ah, here's my little champion," remarked his mother, "I hear you didn't knock anyone unconscious this time round." "Oh mum!" said the girl, who Harry could only assume to be Sarah. He had a sister.

When Harry had been younger, he'd often dreamt of someone - maybe long lost family of some kind - coming to whisk him away from his spider-filled cupboard, and take him somewhere, somewhere far away, where you were allowed to lick the icing from the bowl, even

though it would probably make you sick. Somewhere with loud music, a bed you could hide under when the witching hour began and a garden with gnarled trees for climbing. Someone who had a dog or a cat named Spot, someone who could laugh until they cried. But most of all, more than anything else, he'd wanted a brother or a sister. And now suddenly, he had exactly that. Sarah, Harry guessed, was probably in her second year of Hogwarts (or would be rather) and looked extraordinarily like himself, except she wasn't wearing glasses. Her whole face was animated; especially those green eyes. She was looking straight at him. No, Harry suddenly realised, she was talking to him, and he hadn't heard a word of it.

"Er, sorry?" he said apologetically, "I missed that." "Honestly Harry," said Sarah, rolling her eyes, "if you were any dozier you'd be a flobber worm and I'd have to feed you lettuce." She came and sat down on the next to him, their parents had gone through the living room, and sounded to be in the kitchen. "I said: 'How's your head, it's not going to fall off is it 'cuz it's big and heavy and we'd have to kick out the door 'cuz no one could pick it up' and then I asked you out for Cho Chang, but you're obviously not interested so I'll just have to go tell her no." At the end of this she gave Harry a rather innocent look that reminded him strongly of Fred and George Weasley. I think I'm going to like having a sister he thought with a grin.

"So, Cho Chang?" he asked. Sarah nodded, still keeping the oh-not-so-sincere look splashed all over her face. He laughed. Maybe some things never change, even in Alternate Realities. "Hey, do you want to put my Firebolt away with me?" said Sarah getting up, "you could see Hedwig, she only came back a couple of hours ago."

Apparently there were other things that hadn't changed either.

Sarah took Harry out the back door into a very large garden. It was nicely kept with colourful flowers spilling out all over the place - neater than the Weasleys, but a mess compared to Aunt Petunia's. which really wasn't a hard thing to accomplish when you considered that Aunt Petunia tended to measure the grass with a ruler. Poking their heads out of the various forms of plant life were all sorts of little stone ornaments; cute gnomes with big hats, gargoyles, toads and griffins. Angels adorned the water feature to Harry's left, and they

winked and waved as he and his sister walked past. Harry stopped and turned round to take a good look at his house. It was even bigger than he'd initially thought, and appeared to be in the middle of nowhere - or at least well back from any town. He could see the Quidditch trophies by his own window shinning in the weak sunshine. Other windowsills contained the backs of photo frames, ornate crockery and fat teddy bears. Through one of the pairs of curtains on the ground floor he could see a piano - maybe Sarah was learning? It never occurred to Harry that he might be the one who tinkled with the ivory.

Then without warning, Harry was hit with images of a night fifteen years ago, when someone from a very different place had arrived at this house to find it in ruins, and Harry himself crying helpless amidst the debris. He shuddered. For four and a half years that had been his nightmare, and now he felt he was looking at a ghost. "You alright?" said Sarah, "not going to faint again or anything?" With some effort Harry pulled him self away from that vision, for now at least, it had never happened.

"Yeah, I'm fine," he assured her. She rolled her eyes. "You do realise I'm going to be thirteen in a few months," she said as she put her hands on her hips, "you can stop treating me like a two year old." She poked her tongue out and strutted off. Was this how all teenage sisters acted? Harry couldn't help but wonder. Swaying up ahead in the November breeze were the trees Harry had seen from his bedroom window; now he could see them more closely they looked almost as gnarled as the ones he used to daydream about. Harry stuck his hands in his pockets, and shivered slightly - it was pretty damn freezing out here. His breath looked like baby Norbert's steam, though with a little less sparkage. Sarah put her broom in a shed set into some evergreen trees - there were a couple of rusty bikes in there (could Harry ride a bike in this reality he pondered?) as well as the usual gardening tools and a growling old fridge-freezer - presumably generated by magic, not electricity. Sarah then led Harry to their own little owlery. "She's a bit tired," Sarah informed Harry, "she only just got back from Galway - but she'll be well pleased to see you I bet." She walked under the covered archway where five or six owls of varying sizes and colours were sleeping. Harry wondered fleetingly why his owl would have flown to Southern Ireland, but then a familiar hoot reached his ears and the snowy white bird swooped gracefully down

onto his shoulder.  
"It's good to see you here," said Harry softly, scratching Hedwig's head. She nipped his ear affectionately. He couldn't believe she was here; what were the chances? He smiled, "I should have known you'd find me - you always do."  
Harry had a thought.  
As Sarah filled up the owls' water bowl, Harry whispered something even softer into Hedwig's ear:  
"I have a job for you old friend."

The thing about chess was, well, actually, Harry didn't know what the thing was about chess - that was Ron's department. What Harry did know was that, probably after investing a good many hours in the game, his dad and sister played some pretty mean moves. For quite a while, as the sun slowly dipped, Sarah and James had played chess - they in the living room, Harry perched by the fireplace, watching. After a time Lily called Harry into the kitchen to help with dinner. Apparently his mother was going some sort of Italian faze; last night it was lasagne, tonight spaghetti bolognese. They chatted mainly about the European Quidditch League - something Harry thankfully knew about - if she'd brought up something like last week's potions homework he would have been a bit stuck. They were occasionally interrupted by the odd "That's cheating!" and "Do that again missy you'll end up with donkey ears," from the other room. By the time dinner was ready the sun had long disappeared, as well as the maturity from the living room. Instead of laying the table like she was supposed to, Sarah presented her mum with several rather battered pawns and a irritated knight, saying that dad had been a little over zealous in his duelling and could she please stop the shinny black pieces from dancing the can-can? During dinner his parent's talked about work. Harry mainly just listened, watching his family. He learned that his mum was a self-employed professional charms designer, off to Hong Kong in a couple of weeks to set up protection wards on some rich minister's house. His dad worked for the ministry - a type of security or intelligence position from what Harry could gather, though he talked less about his actual job and more about the bachelor party he and some bloke called Trips were throwing for some other bloke called Martin. Lily asked slyly if they were going to invite the infamous 'Milly the Minx' again as she apparently so enjoyed his own bachelor party; at this James coughed into his Butter Beer and went pink around the ears. Dessert was sparkly strawberry and pretzel ice cream. Just as Sarah was trying to bargain her way into a second bowl there was a tap, tap, tap on the living room window-pane. "I'll get it," said Harry immediately, scraped his chair back and darted into the lounge. Sure enough, Hedwig was waiting patiently out side - Harry opened the window to let his owl (accompanied by some rather freezing wind)

inside. At first Harry thought, as was expected, that she'd had come back empty handed; however taking a closer look, he realised that strapped to her leg was a tiny strip of paper. "Well done Hedwig!" whispered Harry in earnest and took the paper from her. He ran back to the kitchen and stuck his head round the door. "I'm going to go out for a bit, I'll be back soon okay?" His parents didn't look to happy.

"Hang on Harry," said his dad, "where are you going?" "Err. just to visit a friend," Harry said, pleading silently for them not to ask any more questions and let him go. It seemed to work. "Well, wrap up and be back by nine," said his mum, who it seemed had finally given in to Sarah's pot-plant-lip protests and was getting her another bowl of ice cream. Relieved, Harry bolted up the stairs and into his bedroom. Within a few minutes he'd pulled on an extra jumper (with "Kickers" splashed all over the sleeves for some reason) a pair of pretty cool Charlie Weasley type boots and a three quarter length black coat. On his desk was lying Harry's old wand. When he picked it up to pocket it he assumed it would be different - longer or a different wood maybe; but it was exactly the same. In fact, on closer inspection, it was completely identical to the one he always carried with him, the one presented to him by Mr Olivander all those years ago. Same scratches and the faint scorch mark - it even smelt the same. Harry couldn't help but wonder if it really was his wand and it had somehow found its way into this world with him. After all, what was closer to a wizard than his wand? Hedwig's piece of paper placed carefully in his pocket, Harry made his way down stairs once more - this time round noticing the waving photos mounted on the wall as he walked down the steps. At the front door he stopped to pick up a rather large book he had seen earlier and went into the lounge. Once there Harry faced the fireplace and let the Emerald Pages fall open in his arms. The muggle world, Harry knew, had something called the Yellow Pages - this was a similar effort, only a rather sickly lime green (not emerald as the title suggested) and instead of containing telephone numbers it listed all the public Floo Powder stations in Britain; fireplaces on the Floo Network hidden from prying muggles eyes, thereby avoiding the usual obvious dilemmas of muggle sightings leading to expensive memory charms (or as in harder times, a good clout on the head from the wizard guard), but also to stop them doing silly things like sweeping the fireplaces or try

and toast things in them. Harry had used this form of public transport before - when he'd tried to get to Diagon Alley from the Weasley's house and ended up in Knockturn Alley, the wizarding part of London generally left out of the tourist guides. It wasn't surprising therefore that he was a little apprehensive about stepping into the flames, but he was too young to know how to apparate from place to place, so there was really nothing else for it.

Taking a deep breath he flung some of the glittery powder he'd found in a nearby jar into the grate, stepped confidently in, cried, "Grafterstone, Kent!" And before he knew it all the world was spinning, until once again, everything went black.

For a fleeting moment, Harry thought it really had all been a dream. I mean, he thought, the whole affair really had been ridiculous, and now it seemed he was waking up in the hospital wing with Madame Pomfrey moaning at him for knocking himself unconscious again. That would be the usual run of things. But soon enough, the moment passed and someone was hauling him up of the freezing stone floor.

"You alright there sir?"

Harry focused on the face of a wizard in his late fifties in navy blue work robes. They were in a little room - the Floo Powder station. It contained only a rather small desk, presumably where the guard sat when he wasn't hoisting up nauseated travellers, and for some reason, a muggle satellite dish.

"Er - yeah, sorry about that," said Harry a little groggily, "I haven't travelled by Floo Powder in a while - got a little disorientated, I didn't break anything did I?" The guard chuckled.

"No, you're alright there Mr Potter."

Harry smiled as a thanks and went to go out the door, when he suddenly realised something.

"How did you know my name?" he asked the guard bewildered. Surely he wasn't still famous in this upside-down world? After all, he'd never defeated Voldemort.

"Aren't you James Potter son," said the guard uncertainly, "the one who plays all the Quidditch?"

"Oh," Harry said quite relieved, "yeah, fair enough, that's me." He grinned and walked out the door. He had to admit, being famous for Quidditch would be a lot better than the garden variety fame he was

used to. Usually it was "Let's see your scar then, cool, does it hurt, does it flash neon green, does it give you x-ray vision, is You-Know-Who really bald.blah blah woof woof." This type of fame could possibly involve signing autographs to hoards of screaming fans. Yep, Harry though, he could probably handle that kind of fame. Out in the open it was truly 'Brass Monkeys'. Harry didn't actually have a clue what the saying was on about, but Dean Thomas used it a lot when it was cold. Ron would just say it was 'Bloody Freezing'. Harry took a quick look at the directions on his bit of paper, stuck them back in his pocket, and started crunching along the icy pavement. Every few footfalls brought him into orange lamp-light; he crossed the occasional road, walked through a park and a Basket Ball court, and once had to navigate a rather disconcerting bridge that insisted on swaying violently every step he took. Eventually, Harry stopped. He looked at the sign in front of him: "Granger Orthodontics, Keeping a Smile On Your Face!" "I don't know how you did it Hedwig," said Harry softly, "but damn it you did."

Not sure what to expect, Harry pushed the front door open and walked inside. He was in a foyer that smelled, funny enough, like mouth wash. A grandfather clock that stood to his right chimed quarter past seven making him jump. "Can I help you?" A blond girl with glasses at reception was looking at him expectantly. "It's just we close in a couple of minutes, do you want to book an appointment?" Harry was just going to open his mouth when a lady with bushy brown hair walked past him carrying a clip board. He spun around. "Excuse me-" he checked the name tag - bingo. "Dr Granger, is Hermione about?" She eyed him suspiciously. "Who are you?" "A friend of Hermione's from school," replied Harry automatically; after all it was the truth, "she said I could come round so we could - work on some maths homework together." He hoped he sounded convincing. "Crafton Hill?" Harry nodded, assuming she was talking about Hermione's school. This was apparently a good enough explanation for her. "Hermione's in the house - just through that door there." She pointed to a wooden door opposite the clock, then carried on into the

patients waiting room - "Thomas Crupp?" Harry took a last look at Dr Granger before darting over to the door, pulling it open (flashing a smile at the receptionist as he did) and walked confidently through. He was in a landing at the bottom of a flight of stairs.

Hermione was at the top. "Hello?" she said taken a back, "can I help you?" She started walking cautiously down the top few steps; it struck Harry as odd that she wasn't wearing her black school robes. Why would she be when he thought about it logically, but still, the black tartan skirt and purple jumper were another reminder that this really wasn't his Hermione. "Do I know you, or are you lost?" Evidently still bossy though. "Erm." Harry began. Now he was here he wasn't actually all that sure what he was going to say to her. "Well.I-" he tried again, but it wasn't working. He decided to go for the all out approach. "Yes, I- I need to talk to you, but not here, and I do know you but it's kind of complicated, could we go to your room?" he finished lamely. Now she probably thought he was some kind of pervert. Great. Sure enough, she eyed him suspiciously. "I'll give you five minutes, I'm in the middle of a History essay." Figures, thought Harry. He walked up the stairs until he was level with Hermione; he noticed a wire retainer on her (perfect) top teeth. She then turned, indicating for Harry to follow, and walked up to the first floor landing. "That's my bedroom." She pointed to a door on their left, "I'll be there in just a second."

She turned on her heals and walked into the bathroom opposite, so Harry did as he'd been instructed and went into Hermione's room. Once inside he closed the door and instantly felt self-conscious - he'd never been in a girl's bedroom before. But he really didn't have anything to worry about; as he would have expected if he'd really thought about it, Hermione's room was in pristine condition. Bed made, floor tidy and a desk with neat pots of pens, a pad of paper and a single text book: "A Study of Nazi Germany" - Harry personally felt he would prefer Binns' Goblin Rebellions. He sat on Hermione's bed - it was purple - and took off his coat. On the wall opposite him was a rather large poster of someone called Keanu Reeves, whoever that was, and a clock with enamelled roman numerals. In one corner there were several stacks of sheet music, as well as a flute and a violin, each on their respective stands. The music looked quite complex, but then again Harry didn't read music

so who was he to judge. Hermione opened the door with a snap making Harry start. Closing the door once more, she swivelled her desk chair and sat down facing Harry. She'd apparently taken her retainer out whilst he'd been looking round her room. "So," she prompted, "what can I do for you? I'm afraid if you're looking for help with your homework my schedule's pretty full already, but maybe—" She pulled open a draw and took out a diary.

"Hang on a minute," interrupted Harry as she was rifling through the pages, "that's not why I'm here." Hermione looked up. "It's not?" She sounded a little surprised, Harry shook his head. "Oh." She placed the book on top of her essay and then seemed unsure of what to do with her hands, eventually deciding to slip them under her thighs.

"Okay, what then?"

But Harry was intrigued. "Why would you assume I was here for homework tuition?" Hermione fidgeted.

"I'm kind of well known for it, so I figured." She looked a little sad for a moment, then shrugged. "I'm not what you'd call a social bunny." There was a considerable pause. Harry was getting that feeling again that maybe this world wasn't all it was cracked up to be. "Hermione, I've been trying to work out how to explain something to you - and I think maybe the best way is just to tell you everything I know and hope you don't, um, be afraid or y'know, think I'm lying, because I'm not." Harry really hoped this was going to work; he wasn't too sure who else he could possibly turn to if it didn't. "Will you listen a bit?" Hermione frowned slightly but inclined her head; Harry took that as a yes.

"Where I come from, everything's different. the world's different." Hermione considered.

"You mean, you don't have electricity or something?"

"No, no nothing like that - erm," Harry changed tactics, "have you heard of something called a Alternate Reality?"

"Yeah," said Hermione slowly, "like in movies and stuff." She looked suspicious again, "why?"

Harry took a deep breath. "Because that's where I'm from. I'm from a place where we go to school together, you, me and a boy called Ron - we're best friends you see, we do all this stuff together and (here was the crunch point) we do magic. We go to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and we do magic."

"Right," said Hermione evenly.

In one fluid movement she lent under her desk, gasped a tennis racquet, and flung it round in a circle to a point over her shoulder. Perhaps Harry should have mentioned 'don't hurt me' to those conditions a second ago.

"Hermione no!"

"Get out you psycho!" she yelled jumping to her feet. Harry did likewise, not wanting to let her get a height advantage - he'd witnessed the infamous Draco Malfoy Slap two years ago and did not intend to be around for the sequel.

"Listen!"

"Bastard! Git! Out now!" Her parents were going to hear, Harry had to do something.

"Hermione-"

"Do I look stupid?" She advanced a couple more steps backing Harry into the wall, "you think you're clever, winding me up like this? Oh pathetic Hermione the larry, let's torment her some more." She was mimicking now; things were becoming really scary.

"Hermione just let me-"

"GET OUT!"

"Accio tennis racquet!" The racquet flew the length of the room, out of a very shocked Hermione's grasp and into Harry's outstretched left hand. His right gripped his wand. Maybe a bit of that would convince her.

Hermione fainted.

Not only was Harry in a girl's bedroom now; said girl was lying on the floor unconscious. Not Good.

He put the racquet down (but kept a hold of his wand) and hoisted Hermione up into a sitting position against the bed. The thought flittered across Harry's mind that he'd actually just performed a spell out of school - it was overtaken, along with some rather vicious road rage, by his immense not caring.

"Hermione." He shook her slightly, "wake up." It wasn't working. Harry tried to think what people normally did to revive other people - then realised ironically he was normally the one knocked out of it so wasn't really in a position to give advice. "Hermione! You're - you're late for school!" Nothing. "Um.you need to finish your History essay - no! You only got 6 out of 10 for your History essay!" That did it. "Wah - what!" Hermione snapped awake. At the sight of Harry she went rigid but he grabbed her shoulders before she could bolt.

"I'm not going to hurt you-"  
"Let go!" she wriggled, and Harry was strongly reminded of Crookshanks when he got pinned in a corner.  
"Look, we got off on the wrong foot," Harry eased his grip, "just listen." Hermione glared but stayed sitting. Harry took that as a good sign and completely let go of her. "Greater, thank you." He rocked back on his heels and sat opposite Hermione, feeling that pang of sadness again at having to restrain his best friend on her own bedroom floor.

"Hey, did I even tell you my name?" Harry offered as an olive branch, "I don't think I did - it's Harry Potter." "A.K.A. psycho-boy?" snuck in Hermione acidly. Harry'd had enough now.

"Your name - is Hermione Granger; your parents, who are both dentists, didn't give you a middle name because they thought it would make the rest of it look messy, but personally you'd quite like Elizabeth or Louise just like everyone else. Your birthday is September 19th and you always get school equipment; you chew your index finger when you're nervous, but twist your hair when frustrated - especially with homework. At school you despair of most people you know, but also wish for their acceptance; you're lonely, and bury yourself under your studies. Before you go to sleep you have to have a glass of milk otherwise you wake up with cotton-mouth; your favourite colour is blue; you hate playing sport, not because you don't like being part of a team, but because you think everyone else won't think you're good enough. How am I doing?"

Hermione looked sick. In fact she'd turned the rather attractive shade of two-day-old porridge. "How did you-?"

"Because I wasn't lying, I know you, we are best friends and we do practice magic." Harry took her hand gently, "let me show you something."

She let him pull her to her feet and over to the door. Harry turned the key in the lock, pulled it out and placed it in her hand. "Watch this." He rested the tip of his wand on the handle. "Alohomora!" They heard the door click. "Open it," instructed Harry, and Hermione cautiously did. When it swung inwards easily she gasped. Harry smiled. "That's a favourite of yours y'know, now watch this." He pulled the door closed again, turned and pointed to the purple curtains; "overtum!" They zoomed open, then "fermier!" They shut. "Wow," said Hermione softly, "that's - real, isn't it?"

"Yep," agreed Harry relieved.  
"What was that one you did earlier?" Harry noticed she avoided saying 'magic' or 'spell'.  
"That was a summoning spell, but it's quite advanced, oh - there's this one - it's also kinda sentimental." He pointed at her History textbook. "Wingardium Leviosa!" It flew up a couple of feet and hovered.

Hermione's eyes were wide. She looked carefully from the book to Harry as he glided it back down to the desk. Slowly, concentrating on the book, she reached up and took Harry's wand right out of his hand. Ordinarily, Harry would have protested, but he sensed a breakthrough coming. Hermione pointed at "A Study of Nazi Germany" and cried "Wingardium Leviosa!" The entire desk wobbled. Hermione shot two feet back with surprise onto Harry's shoes. Instead of the "Owwch!" he was sorely tempted to yell, Harry simply bit his tongue and took his wand back. "Scary huh?" Hermione nodded. "I'm guessing you're pretty good at school Hermione, but at Hogwarts, no one's half the witch you are. That's why I'm here, I wanted you to help me figure out my situation, coz you're so much better at stuff like that than me, and, well, I guess I needed to just talk to someone." He gave her a searching look, "so how are you feeling now?"

For almost an hour the two talked on Hermione's bedroom floor. Harry explained what his world was like, how different this world was and what he assumed to be the trigger for the "Dimensional Leap" - as Hermione referred to it as - when he lost his temper in the History classroom. He went into some detail about Hermione's alter-ego too; that the ministry in this reality deemed it too unsafe for muggles to be introduced into the Wizarding World as violent as it was, so she had never been called by letter to Hogwarts as she should have been. Hermione asked endless questions about magic (she'd finally brought herself to say it) as well as the castle and the Ministry. She wasn't that interested in Quidditch, but then again she never was. "The way I see it," she said matter of factly, "there are three possibilities. One, you're either dreaming or crazy; and either way that would mean this world only exists in your head, so technically I wouldn't be real which is quite depressing." "But if that was the case, why would dream you be telling me that,"

put in Harry reasonably, "dream you would presumably want me to keep dreaming so you kept existing." Wow, try dealing with that concept when you're drunk thought Harry. "And your head probably wouldn't allow for that kind of er, flaw? in your 'plot,'" Hermione was nodding, "good thinking Batman." "Batman?"

"It's a muggle saying." She was learning fast - of course. "So, discard that. Option two is that somehow time was altered - either a single event - a specific key moment or decision was changed, or during a course of events something was different, and that's led to what you see now - this one's a slightly more plausible idea-" But Harry was shaking his head. "My experience of time-travel kind of makes me think it's not that simple to alter something so subtly, you'd just end up wiping out the entire world or something." He was vividly remembering Hermione's warnings about using the time-turner - killing yourself by accident or causing wars instead of simply ensuring that your Potions homework was finished on time for example. "OK, so the last option is probably our best." Hermione took a moment, probably to marvel at the subject matter of this conversation, before continuing. "There's a theory, most likely a French one, that everything that could happen, does happen. So that would mean there are literally thousands of Parallel Universes existing side by side one an other, yet totally oblivious to each other's existence. Maybe you found some sort of bridge between two of them?" Harry liked that idea. "So, almost like walking through a door into another room?"

"Yeah, I think so," said Hermione smiling. Harry was smiling too. "But hang on a minute," he frowned, "how do you know all this? They don't teach you this in Muggle schools or something?" "No!" Hermione was laughing, "I just watch way too many films, like er - "Back to the Future", and "Terminator" - they're a mine of useful information about time-travel and all that you know!" She was really laughing now, Harry too. The bizarreness of the situation had apparently caught up to both of them. After a while they eased the hysterics back down to grinning. "OK, so how do I get back?" asked Harry. Hermione pondered. "Well, in theory you'd just have to open the doorway again, but I guess that's easier said than done hey?" Harry sighed. "No, I wouldn't even know where to begin," he admitted. "Normally I'd look something like this up, but I doubt there are any

reference books on Parallel Universes, even finding something on the internet would be unlikely."

"I wouldn't be too sure about that," said Harry thoughtfully, "I bet my parents have something we could sift through, or if not at least point us in the right direction. Why don't we go back to my house?" Quite a dramatic change flew over Hermione's facial expression, in fact she now looked remarkably like a rabbit in head-lights. "Oh, erm, what - now? I don't, I mean I think-" She stood up and started ringing her hands, Harry followed suit.

"What's the matter?" He was honestly quite bewildered. "Well, it's dark outside, and I never normally go out anyway, let alone unexpectedly, with a boy I just met." She met his eyes. "I want to help, I really do, but what can I say to my parents?" Harry wasn't surprised that Hermione didn't want to disobey her parents, or even ask permission for something they might refuse; what he was surprised about was the fact that she hadn't thought of some clever plan to get around it yet. It must be all those years hanging around with me and Ron that's made her so sneaky thought Harry.

"Why don't you say you're going to the library, I'm guessing you go there often enough?"

"Oh, yeah," breathed Hermione, "that's clever, we could say we need to look up er, Cairo or something like that for Geography."

"Actually, I told your mum we were doing Maths," admitted Harry.

"You would have," said Hermione, shaking her head, "that's my best subject you know?"

Hermione stood outside her parents' office a full five minutes before Harry was able to persuade her to knock on the door. Her confidence seemed to have been severely dented in this world too he noticed; four and a half years as a social reject will do that to you though. "Come in," came a man's voice through the wood - Harry assumed it to be that of Hermione's dad. She gave Harry one last look, to which he responded with a thumbs up, and opened the door. Leaving it a crack so Harry could hear, Hermione proceeded to explain that she didn't actually have the book that explained the trigonometry problems that they were working on, but Grafterstone Library did, and the homework was due in tomorrow, and it really wasn't that far to walk, and she'd bring the mobile phone, and they wouldn't be that long, and -

At this point her dad seemed to interrupt her. "Hermione," he said patiently, "I'm sure you can look after yourself; if it's really that important, don't worry about it, just go." Harry could practically feel her tension ebb out of the room. "I would like you to bring the phone though, just in case."

"Thanks dad," breathed Hermione, obviously relieved. The next second she came out again beaming. "See, that wasn't so hard was it?" said Harry grinning. I'm such a bad influence - getting her lying to her parents, he thought privately, we'll be smoking and shop-lifting next. He was actually quite enjoying himself - it must be the way Fred and George felt corrupting Ron and Ginny.

They walked over to a cupboard near the front door (the actual house entrance as opposed to the reception) and Hermione removed a long, dark purple coat, as well as black gloves and a scarf. She pulled the coat on and gave him an embarrassed, almost apologetic look. "I know it's sad, but my parents got it for me last Christmas and I don't have another one." Harry looked at the floor length coat; smartly buttoned at the front, with velvet cuffs and collar. Personally, he felt Fleur Delacoeur would have worn it without question, which to him roughly translated as 'that's expensive and bloody gorgeous' - which is what he told Hermione, in so many words. She blushed slightly and wrapped the scarf around her neck. Once outside Harry wished he himself had his red and yellow Gryffindor scarf - if it was possible it had got even colder whilst he'd been inside. "This way," he indicated, and they started walking down the road.

Hermione pulled a rectangular box-like object out of her pocket and started to push buttons on it clumsily with gloved fingers. Harry suddenly realised it was a phone she was turning on. "Erm," said Harry, "I don't know if you'll actually be able to use that."

Hermione looked at him. "Why not?" "Well, magic interferes with electrical things like phones or CD players - they just sort of hiss and fizz and you can't do anything with them."

Hermione looked stricken. "Oh, but, I told my dad I'd be able to phone them." There was a slight pleading note in her voice, like she was asking Harry to change the laws of physics (well, magic actually). Harry grinned. "You can owl them if you need to," he said reassuringly, "don't worry."

"Owl them?" So Harry explained about owl post, and told her that his owl, Hedwig, was exceptionally good at delivering letters. Hermione seemed quite charmed by the idea of owls flying through the air with letters tied to their feet and forgot all about her phone. As they were walking over that bridge Harry loved so much (it wobbled even more with two people on it) Hermione broke the silence. "So, you said we were best friends," Harry nodded, "and that there was another boy - John was it?"

"Ron," Harry corrected as they walked down the steps. Hermione nodded. "So what's he like, in this world I mean, is he Muggle- Born too?"

"No," said Harry, "definitely not Muggle-Born. His family's one of those old wizarding families, they're really great, we spend the Summer Holidays there a lot," he allowed himself to grin. "There's nine of them y'know."

"Nine?!" said Hermione shocked.

Harry laughed, "Yeah, it's a bit mad," he thought. "Let's see, there's Charlie, Bill - no, sorry, Bill then Charlie, um, Percy, Fred and George - they're twins, then it's Ron and the youngest is Ginny. I don't know how their parent's cope."

"So he'd be more or less the same in this world then," guessed Hermione, "I'd love to meet him." But Harry's face fell - Hermione saw it.

"What's wrong?"

Harry stopped walking and gave an empty sigh. "Do you remember what I told you what happened when I was a baby, about Voldemort?" She nodded. "And that in this world that never happened?" He paused. "Because he was never defeated, his attacks and everything continued, and Ron, his entire family, well, you see not only did his dad work for the Ministry, and I'm guessing Percy did here too, they loved muggles as well and Voldemort - he killed them. All of them."

Hermione was pale. "Oh Harry," she said quietly, "I'm so sorry." She put her hand on his arm. Harry gazed at the quarter moon. "You know, this world isn't all that great," He sat down on the edge of the pavement, his back against someone's garden wall. "It's confusing and depressing really." Hermione sat down beside him. "My parents-" he could a cold feel lump rising in his throat, "when I somehow defeated Voldemort when I was a baby, he - he killed them first, they tried to protect me and he killed them." His eyes were itching. This was the first time he'd allowed himself to think about this

since he'd woken up in his bed-that-wasn't-his-bed. "I met my parents today, this afternoon I heard my mum's voice and I - met my sister." Harry turned and looked at her. "I have a little sister Hermione. She's not meant to exist, they're supposed to be dead, all of them; all my life I've had to accept they're never coming back, and now I can walk through my front door and they're there." A cold tear slide down his face but he didn't feel it. "My parent's are resurrected, but my best friend is dead and the rest of the Wizarding world lives in terror of someone I should have stopped and all I can think about is going home, but I'm walking away from my family." Hermione put her arm around him. "Oh Harry-" Tears were falling silently down his face resting on his knees. "Harry, it's OK." But it wasn't.

"No one even knows why he was after me," he said bitterly, "their death's were pointless, avoidable and all because of me. It never happened here, why I don't know, but I've got the family I've always dreamed of; the thing is - at what price? You're miserable and lonely, Ron and his whole family are dead, Hogwarts is closed. I think I have to leave, because my world may not be perfect, but it's a better world than this. I don't belong here." There was a pause. "Even if it means I never see my family again. Ever." Hermione nodded and they sat in silence for a while. "You know though, what ever happens, whether you can go home or not, you've given me something I probably never would have had before - the truth." Harry raised his head slightly and looked at her. "When I was twelve," she continued, "Jenny Richins and her pack of minxes cornered me in a science lab one lunch time and started throwing all the stuff out of my bag around the classroom." Hermione smiled slightly. "They started chanting 'Bossy Boffin Granger' over and over again then threatened to set my French books on fire with a Bunsen Burner." She looked Harry in the eye, "I shattered all the windows - every single one of them. They couldn't prove it, but I knew I'd done it; I was the only one not covered in glass for one thing. Ever since then everyone not only thought I was an insufferable know-it-all but a total and utter freak, myself included. I've never had any real friends," she continued ruefully, "and I've never had an explanation, because it wasn't the first or last time something like that happened you see." She stood up and took Harry by the hands, pulling him up too. "What I'm trying to say is, I know this must be so hard for you, but I'm here for you, and I always will be. Together, we're going to get you home,

but that doesn't mean you'll ever forget your family, or me, the me here I mean, okay?"

Harry smiled, his cheeks stinging slightly from the salty tears and the wind blowing round his face. "Thank you Hermione," he said gently, meeting her eyes, "I knew you'd help." "Well that's what friends are for isn't it? Now tell me all about this Ron."

It was almost half an hour later when Harry and Hermione stepped through the fireplace at the Floo Powder Station; Harry had gone through first, hoping Hermione would be able to follow safely. He fell out of his own fireplace a few moments later, this time managing to keep his balance.

Sitting on the couch in front of him were Seamus Finnigan and Parvati Patil.

"Mrs P, he's back!" called out Parvati as she leaped off the couch and flung her arms around him.

"Err," was all Harry could get out before he felt the fire swirl behind him and Hermione was spat gracefully out onto the floor in a heap. "Glurchoh," was all she was able to mutter. Parvati let go of Harry in surprise, Seamus, being the gentleman he was, helped her to her feet.

"Harry James Potter!" his mum called from the kitchen, "it is almost ten thirty, explain yourself!" She entered the room holding a huge dusty book, wand tucked behind her ear, hair in a head-scarf and a face like thunder. "Oh," she said a little less violently on catching sight of Hermione, who in turn was looking a little less green, "hello?" "Um, everyone," said Harry, "this is Hermione, she's a friend of mine - a pen-friend," he amended.

Lily Potter seemed reluctant to skin her only son alive in front of polite company, so she pursed her lips, said "it's very nice to meet you Hermione, I'll speak to you later Harry," and swept out of the room. The slamming of a door suggested she was in the study Harry had come across earlier.

Sarah could be heard faintly playing the piano in the background. An expectant silence filled the room; during which Hermione swayed a bit before landing on an armchair in the corner of the room, Parvati and Seamus shared meaningful looks, and several pennies went 'clank, clank' as they dropped in Harry's head. If Ron and Neville had really been killed, and Hogwarts had stopped

admitting Muggle-Born students, he, Seamus and Parvati would be the only students left in Gryffindor - no wonder they were in his living room; they were probably best friends by default. That also explained why Hedwig had flown to Ireland. It was Parvati who broke the silence. "Y'know, you really scared us Harry." Her eyes were wide - Harry recognised that look, it was the look she got when discussing some scandalous gossip with Lavender Brown - that 'ooh, what a drama!' kind of glee. "I mean, when Seamus got that letter saying you'd passed out we came here as soon as we could, to find you'd woken up and gone missing!" "Parvati," said Harry patiently, "I wasn't missing, I was just a bit late, that's all." She folded her arms and sat back down next to Seamus on the couch. Harry noticed that they actually looked quite different to the Gryffindors he was used to - well, maybe not Parvati - she was dressed head to toe in muggle clothes, pink being a predominant colour of course, and a rather large glittered butterfly adorned the end of her long plat. No, it was Seamus who had changed the most. His sandy hair, normally quite short, was on the whole shoulder-length and quite unruly; it partially hid a gold stud earring in his right ear. He was wearing leather trousers à la Charlie Weasley, boots similar to Harry's and a dark red shirt, untucked and unbuttoned at the top, with a black top underneath. He looked cool? Harry was just about to elaborate on his answer when there was a knock at the front door. "Get that Harry!" came his mother's clipped voice, so Harry shrugged and did as he was told; he crossed the living room, went under the archway into the hallway and pulled open the door. Draco Malfoy was standing on the other side.

Chapter  
What's My Line?

Three

Well, that was a bit of a shock.  
It passed pretty quickly.

"What the Hell are you doing here Malfoy?" Harry spat out. The blond boy gave him a surely look, shoved past Harry and walked into the living room. Parvati gasped when she saw who it was, Seamus jumped to his feet. From their reaction Harry gathered Malfoy's appearance was as much of a shock to them as it was to him. Notch up one for this world - at least he wasn't bestest buddies with The-Boy-Who-Wore-To-Much-Hair-Gel.

Harry paused a second then slammed the door. He thought he would have been more surprised at Draco Malfoy showing up at his home, but taking into context the day so far, Snape could probably have arrived on one knee and proposed and he wouldn't have been that fazed.

Seamus, however, looked to be barely containing his rage; his fists clenching and unclenching in time to the vain throbbing in his temple. Parvati sneered and bit her polished thumb nail; something Hermione had told Harry she only did when she was extremely agitated like when Harry had walked off on her at the Yule Ball; but they didn't talk about that much.

And Hermione well, she obviously had no clue who this strange boy was, but she certainly sat up in her chair at the other three's reaction. Malfoy stopped in the middle of the living room, apparently unaware that everyone was gawking at him, stuck his hands in his pockets and looked round at the surroundings. He grimaced as Sarah struck a wrong note on the piano. "Well isn't this nice Potter?" he said in a bored tone, turning his head sideways to look at the books on the shelves.

Parvati came close to growling. Finally, Malfoy turned and made eye-contact with Harry as if it was costing him by the minute. It wasn't like he'd just barged into his house or anything now was it?

Harry crossed his arms and gave him an equally intense stare, weighing up this world's Draco. As usual when not in school uniform, he was decked head to toe in Gladrag's Wizardwear; trousers, shirt, cloak, even the satchel slung around his neck was decorated in silver GWs.

But, he was, well.dirty.

Draco Malfoy didn't do dirty. Hermione had often speculated he was in fact incapable of such a state. Yet, here he was; trousers torn, cloak ripped and muddy, face smeared and hair totally dishevelled and windswept. He looked like he'd been dragged through a hedge backwards.

Oh for a camera, thought Harry wistfully. Seamus was stood by Harry's side, arm's folded. "You're a bit lost, aren't you Death Eater?" he spat venomously. And what?

Was Harry supposed to be surprised? He had long suspected the only thing that had prevented the ferret-faced git from running off and joining daddy and his mask-wearing snake worshipers as a full-time occupation was the attentions of Pansy Parkinson and her insufferable Draco Malfoy Oestrogen Brigade. Vanity was, after all, something Malfoy excelled at. That and withering looks. The one he was wearing now however was decisively poor in comparison to those he normally reserved for Harry. Obviously not enough practice. Draco had chosen to ignore Seamus. "I came here to talk with you Potter," he paused to throw Parvati a disdainful look and shrugged his shoulders, "when you've finished your Brownie meeting of course."

Seamus made a move to grab Malfoy by the collar; it was all that was needed to send him tripping over his own muddy feet and onto the floor.

"Whoa there Seamus," said Harry flinging his arm out into Seamus' chest. He was actually quite curious to find out what Malfoy wanted from him - he'd blatantly trekked a long way to get it - and besides, if anyone was going to hit him, it would be Harry. At his restraint Seamus backed off and was content to stare daggers from a distance. just for now anyway.

Draco stood himself up in front of the fireplace. There was a mirror hanging above the mantle; when Malfoy's reflection caught sight of his real alter-ego he made a noise like a strangled cat, presumably not having seen him for a week or two, and whimpered about manicures and conditioning shampoo. The real Malfoy scowled and attempted to straighten his hair, dropping his filthy bag on the floor as he did.

He seemed not to notice his momentary loss of all dignity. "You really ought to put a lead on him Potter," he said off-handedly, like he was

discussing the weather.

Harry wasn't particularly in the mood. "What do you want Malfoy?" "Water."

"Come again?" said Harry.

"A glass," he repeated slowly, "of water. I'm parched." Harry stared, incredulous. "I could get it myself," he prompted.

"You came all this way for water?" asked Parvati disbelieving.

"No, shit for brains, I came here for Potter's help, the water's-" but Parvati didn't wait to find out what the water was.

"Help? " she spat out, throwing up her hands in disgust, "Harry's HELP? You utterly.vile creature; the audacity! Help? " She too was now standing, fists clenched and shaking with anger. Harry was

actually quite shocked - Parvati tended to paddle around the shallow end of the pool when it came to real emotion - sure she cried a Hell of a lot, but it was over stolen boyfriends, or the latest cat fight with Lisa Turpin, not anything real. Yet here she was, infuriated over Harry's well-being. "Why should he do anything of the sort the way you've treated him - us? You traitorous piece of-"

"For the benefit of Mankind?" suggested Malfoy impatiently.

Just for once, Parvati was lost for words. Harry had to admit he was also quite shocked - he was expecting something along the lines of 'because I'll have your arms broken if you don't?' not a declaration to

save the world.

"Well," he drawled as an after-thought, "Wizardkind really if you want to be picky - the Muggles can all go hang."

And a spectacular return to form.

"What do you want Malfoy?" Harry repeated, as Hermione stood carefully up. She was smart enough to recognise the filthy tone of the blond boy's voice when he said 'Muggles'. "You want me to join the Death Eaters or something? Because I'm going to take a wild guess

and say I've already passed you up on that offer."

Draco smirked. "When I gave you that ultimatum Potter, before we closed down that breeding ground for Mudbloods in '93, I gave you two choices on my exit: join us or die. What I didn't realise was there are actually three choices, and I myself am also privy to them."

"So we get to kill you?" asked Seamus hopefully, rolling up his sleeves,

"neat."

"Neat?" sneered Malfoy, "okay Finnigan, the Fifties called, they want their lingo back."

"What-?"

"Three choices," he repeated firmly, "join us, die, or change." There was a pause. "How change?" said Parvati carefully. Malfoy flicked his eyes in her direction. "The situation has changed. People have changed. The balance of power has changed." "And being a part of Slytherins you're just itching to take advantage of everyone and everything?" Malfoy switched his gaze to Harry. "Stop jumping to conclusions Potter, you Gryffindors are crap at it." He kicked at his bag spitefully, "it wasn't meant to be like this," he muttered to no one in particular, "there was this big plan, my Father told me about it all the time, but everything's different now." There was a pause, Draco let out a broken sigh. "The Dark Lord believes himself to be superior," Malfoy continued, "which, believe me, I'm not going to argue with. The problem is, to be superior, you need someone underneath you to dominate, otherwise everything falls apart" His eyes dropped to the floor; he blinked and chewed his lip before lifting his gaze out the window. Hermione tutted, folded her arms and arched an eyebrow from behind Malfoy, just so Harry could see. She wasn't impressed, "what an act," she muttered. Draco turned slowly around and gave her half an incredulous glare. "How long have you been waiting to say this?" she demanded. "Honestly, you couldn't sound more rehearsed if you tried; do add another dramatic pause or sigh." Harry was impressed - she obviously hadn't lost all her confidence then. He also noticed Seamus and Parvati looking at her with increasing respect; it gave him an odd sense of pride. Draco clenched his jaw, went to say something, changed his mind and turned back round as if she weren't there. "He's reckless," he carried on stiffly - everyone knowing who 'he' was - "there's no order - no logic to his plans. The Muggle killings are one thing," he paused to blow out a breath and shake his head - Harry felt he couldn't help doing it, "but it's all getting out of hand. The publicity for one thing - Muggles aren't as thick as you'd think, they know something's up when people keep disappearing." Seamus' look suggested he didn't think Muggles were thick - him being Half-Blood and everything - Harry wondered if Malfoy knew that? "It's not good for any wizard - prying Muggles - you can't wipe the entire memory of Great Britain if some one goes public about the existence of magic."

Here Malfoy genuinely seemed to fault, ever so slightly revealing some real emotion. "And if someone questions him, on that or anything else, he kills them." He kicked his bag again. "Instantly, without question. His own people." He rubbed the back of his neck. "Soon there'll be no one left." "And when am I supposed to care?" interrupted Seamus, either not seeing the look of remorse or just not caring, "I didn't hear this sob-story when the Weasleys were murdered in cold blood." "No, you didn't," replied Draco as if that was obvious. Well okay.

"Contrary to popular public opinion," he continued on waspishly, obviously getting fed up of being interrupted, "The Dark Lord is not all powerful, and is certainly not that invincible. That little spat of his with Dumbledore has left him pretty week and pathetic. Some might say vulnerable."

"Like you?" put in Hermione helpfully, her tone cold though. Draco raised an eyebrow, less irritated at the interruption this time; Harry guessed he wanted someone to ask this particular question. just not Hermione.

"Like us," he corrected tersely, "not me, us. Things were fine when we were in charge - we had everyone running scared. But like I said, things have changed." His face was like a mask, he turned to Harry, "Things are getting really serious; I like a hierarchy Potter, as long as I'm on the top. I want out, I want you're help to do it, enough's enough. Muggles, Wizards - allies and enemies; the killing's gone to far." "A resistance movement, how cute." Seamus had his arms folded still, "so why again, are you here at Godric's Hollow, and not, oh - say - The Ministry?"

"Because The Dark Lord is weak; if we're going to strike it has to be now. We have a plan, and several back-up plans to match, but without Potter here, it's all just talk." The young Death Eater turned his eyes pointedly on Harry. "No Cornelius Fudge dithering and screwing things up, no Aurors blowing things and/or people up, and certainly no Dumbledore being all up himself trying to settle some score. No," he shook his head, "all we need, is Harry here." He raised his eyebrows in a superior kind of way, waiting for Harry to freak. But if this was supposed to be some kind of fabulous revelation - that he was the special one, Harry wasn't that impressed - he was The Boy Who Lived after all, famous for defeating Voldemort on numerous occasions.

Well, in one lifetime anyway. But it wasn't Harry who spoke. "You know Harry can fight You-Know-Who and win," Hermione said confidently, like when she took on Snape in Potions, "don't you?" Malfoy turned to Hermione. "You know he's different. You need him." She'd apparently remembered what Harry had told her, all about defeating Voldemort. He was a little creeped out by the idea she was recalling his life's events like some History project.

"Okay, who the Hell are you?" Malfoy said shaking his open hands at Hermione in frustration. "Why do you keep spouting off?" "Because I'm right, aren't I?" He paused a second, then crossed his arms and huffed. It was quite a child-like gesture. "Leave her alone Malfoy," warned Seamus, looking confused still about what had just been said; Harry could tell he was going huh? over and over again in his head until the word lost what little meaning it had. "She's lucky enough not to know what you are." "I'm the deputation," he sniped, "I've climbed Hell and high waters to get here, and none of you are appreciating it, bloody Gryffindors, this is momentous—"

"Crap," cut in Seamus, "this is blatant desperation, you would never ask for a Gryffindor's help unless it was the last option on Earth." "It is the only option you Irish moron! That girl's right - whoever the Hell she is!"

"Hermione Granger," she supplied, a little smug. Malfoy's reaction was instantaneous - he spun around to face her in fury and disbelief. "Mudblood!" he hissed two inches from her face. In a second Seamus had thrown his weight into Malfoy's back and shoved him against the wall past Hermione. Harry was too shocked to stop him. How did Malfoy know Hermione was Muggle-born? "Try spewing obscenities with your teeth on the ground Snake," and Seamus punched him in the stomach, hard. For a moment Harry watched on - then realised what he was seeing. "Stop it," he said as Seamus kicked the already winded boy on the floor. "Stop it! Seamus, STOP IT!" His friend jerked up as Harry yelled at him.

The house was silent. "Don't sink to his level," he said simply. Seamus truly hated him thought Harry; Malfoy must have done something spectacularly awful to get the usually gentle boy so mad. Seamus slowly stood up; his eyes on Harry, Draco was shuddering breaths on the floor, his teeth gritted and intact.

"Harry, what the Hell is going on in there?" James Potter walked through from the kitchen, a glass of fire-whisky in his hand. His mum was by James' side; they were closely followed by another. Sirius Black.

"Sirius-" breathed Harry weekly, shocked and totally taken aback. He looked so different; healthy, tanned, smart, clean-shaven, and - happy. He raised his eyebrows when Harry said his name, his parent's didn't really notice though. Forgetting everyone around him, everything that had happened that day and just this evening, Harry ran to his Godfather and flung his arms around him.

"Erm." Sirius managed whilst everyone else stared. "I-I thought you were dead," Harry uttered; it was close enough to the truth. He didn't want to let go. He just needed to be near such a familiar and comforting figure. His world had been turned up-side-down; but Sirius made sense, and here he was so much better off than his own poor Godfather. He was over-come with emotion, it was too much.

"Harry," Sirius said gently, prying him off, "I'm fine, where'd you hear that?" He held his shoulders like he always did. Harry couldn't bare it, couldn't stop thinking of his own real Sirius, locked up so unjustly, suffering the hatred of the entire wizarding community, with nothing to do but await sentence or even death. And he totally helpless to do anything about it.

Harry shook his head and fought back tears, "I don't know." James walked over and ruffled his hair, "don't worry Harry, everything's fine." He smiled.

"Hey! Isn't that Lucius Malfoy's son?" exclaimed Sirius suddenly, letting go of Harry and reaching for his wand. Malfoy had been leaning against the fire-place, nursing bruised ribs, pointedly ignoring the emotional outburst that had just occurred. Before Harry could explain, or Draco could even bother himself to look up, there was a sharp knock at the door.

Automatically everyone's eyes turned warily in that direction. "Oh," said Lily after a second, "that'll be the others wont it?"

"Yeah," agreed James carefully. He shot a look at Malfoy, "I'll get it." He crossed the room and pulled open the door. "Hey," he greeted whoever it was, "you've come at an interesting time."

Harry heard the door shut, and the next moment Remus Lupin walked into the room. He too looked better in this world; his robes

weren't patched and frayed, his hair had no trace of grey and the bags under his eyes were far less alarming. Having friends must really change you, thought Harry. Remus' reaction to Malfoy was pretty much the same as Sirius'. "Good Lord! Draco Malfoy?" he cried. As everyone else pretty much knew this fact he didn't get much of a response. He stood there unmoving until James came back into the room, where he tried again; "Draco Malfoy?" James shrugged helplessly and walked back to Lily and Sirius.

James was shortly followed by another character. Smaller, weaker. He stepped out of the shadows into the firelight. Harry's stomach plummeted. It was Peter Pettigrew.

A single event. It felt like a kettle had started boiling in Harry's head. Pettigrew had his hands in his pockets, was looking quite confused, almost unnoticed by the rest of the group. Harry saw him. "What did you say Moony?" He was always pretty slow on the uptake. Hate was bubbling over in Harry's mind. Was it the same though? a reasonable part of Harry thought; everything was so different in this world, could it be he wasn't a traitor? When Pettigrew saw Draco though, all doubt was wiped from Harry's mind. One Death Eater to another. All colour drained from Pettigrew's face, he looked physically sick, probably wondering what on Earth Lucius' son was doing there.

A single event. "Traitor," whispered Harry, it was all he could manage. "Harry's right Mrs P," cried Parvati eagerly, thinking he meant Draco, "he just arrived here and started making all these demands like he never ratted the school out or any—" "Traitor," Harry hissed and snatched for his wand, pointing it straight at Pettigrew's chest. The room went deathly still. "Harry James Potter, what" said his father carefully, "do you think you're doing?"

"Harry," Pettigrew's eyes slid swiftly from him to Draco Malfoy, "it's just me - Peter—" "SHUT UP!" Harry's hand was shaking. Wormtail looked almost like he did at the Shrieking Shake; sick, but he wasn't quite terrified

enough. Not yet. "You don't get to speak in my house, don't even - don't even think about it, you - you" "I don't know what you're talking about Harry" "Stop saying my name! Stop it!"

A single event.

It hit him. The trigger last night - who had Harry been blaming for Sirius' predicament, why had his Godfather spent over a decade in prison, why had Voldemort returned to power, killed Cedric? Wormtail. Why had Harry ended up in this particular world? He started laughing. Quietly at first, then louder, gasping for breath. Tears fell down his face - he choked back a sob. "Change," he rasped, "change - you changed back, didn't you?" He looked at Sirius, a frightened, confused expression was on his face. "Fifteen years ago, Voldemort was after my parents, you all knew it." They winced at Harry's use of the word Voldemort. "Everything was the same until then, but then you - you had a Secret Keeper," he stated to his parents. "Who told you about this Harry?" his mother began, "it was years ago -"

"You had a Secret Keeper," he interrupted, "you - you wanted it to be Sirius," Harry struggled to find his words as his throat clamped, Pettigrew was standing there, looking confused as to where this was leading, "and here, in this world, you took on the task, didn't you Sirius? You never made the mistake, you never trusted him, but now everything's worse." Harry had tears running down his face, and this time he could feel them; he dragged his sleeve across his face so he could see. "He never found us and we lived, but everything's gone so wrong."

"Harry, it's okay," said Remus, always tactful, always helpful, "that was a long time ago, we pulled through it - you're right, you lived -" "I'm supposed to live, it's them," he whispered, "it's them. He killed them, oh God he killed them." Harry's eyes, though blurred, were still fixed on Wormtail, so the others were left to wonder who he meant by 'them'. "A single event, a single decision - and look what happened. Everything was the same, then you chose Sirius, not him." Harry gasped in breath and felt faint, weak in the knees, but kept standing.

Pettigrew seemed to think now was the time to try and cover himself. "So what've I done Harry, why are you yelling at -" "Because if Sirius had switched and made you Secret Keeper instead

you would have HANDED US TO VOLDEMORT! "  
Silence. Utter silence.

"Oh God," whispered Parvati.

As if edging away from spilled acid, the rest of the group expanded slightly away from Pettigrew, and from Harry too. They looked unsure why, but they did it. The silence seemed almost tangible. Harry heard Hermione quietly by his side; "that's it, that's what's different here, isn't it?" Harry jerked a nod, not taking his eyes off Pettigrew. Pettigrew trembled slightly. "Harry, what are you talking about?" There were beads of sweat on his lip. "I would never - I mean, I don't - James, you don't think - do you?" Harry's father looked from the shaking figure beside him, framed by the arch-way to the hallway, to his son, still holding his wand out threateningly, his breath shuddering. "Why would you say that Harry?"

"Because it's true," Harry managed.

"His head! He banged his head!" gasped Wormtail, "he's not talking straight, he's not himself!"

Sirius stared at his godson. "He looks alright to me," he said slowly, "except for the fact he's right royally pissed."

"He's crazy! He's lying!"

"You're lying!" screamed Harry. He wasn't going to get away again, not again.

Lily was looking shocked, "Harry, what are you saying-"

"I'm saying he's a back-stabbing traitor!"

"No! It's not true!"

"Um, excuse me?"

Harry didn't look, but Hermione had been chewing her index finger. Now she looked thoughtful and determined; what Harry and Ron referred to as 'that Polyjuice look'. "Why don't you just ask Malfoy?" she said.

"What? Why!" shrieked Pettigrew. "He's concussed, I tell you! He just banged-"

"Shut up!" snapped Hermione, outraged, "Harry did not bang his head."

"Yeah," said Seamus slowly, "Malfoy's all buddy buddy with the Death Eaters after all," he added, "why don't you ask him?"

"Ask me what?" said Draco, petulant, and bit one of his dirty fingernails.

"Is this man a Death Eater?" asked Remus quietly, looking towards

the young Slytherin. "Is what Harry says true, is he a spy?" "Remus, how can you suggest - even ask - it's lies-" "Peter," cried Remus, silencing him with a hand, a pained expression on his face. "Let the boy talk, for pity's sake." Harry saw he purposely avoided making eye contact with Pettigrew. "A Death Eater?" repeated Draco to Remus with a hint of false bravado, "why the Hell would I know?" "Don't play games, boy," growled Sirius, "everyone knows what your family are." He had a dangerous air about him; Harry could feel it, he'd felt it before, but always thought it was the effect of Azkaban. Apparently not.

Draco's head dropped, hurt and a little uneasy, he swallowed and muttered something like "were." Pettigrew was ringing his hands muttering things like "James-I would never, believe me-" Draco's eyes slid in his direction, and bit his lower lip.

A moment of silence. "Yeah," said Draco, suddenly, looking at the floor, "he's a Death Eater, we call him Wormtail." Sirius took a sharp look at his friend, stepped back again and aimed his wand at Pettigrew; Lupin did likewise. "It can't be true," cried Lily, "James, that's Malfoy's son - we can't trust him, he's a Death Eater-" "Yeah, which is precisely how I know he's one too." He pushed himself off the fireplace and spread his hands in agitation. "How do you think we found Arabella Figg, the Macmillans?" "Boy," hissed Pettigrew, "what are you doing?" "You're pathetic," sniped Draco. But Harry couldn't help but feel that Malfoy wasn't exactly sitting comfortably with what he'd just done, though he let the moment pass. "James-no-" spluttered Pettigrew, "he's lying, I wouldn't-" "Then why are you so scared Peter?" came Remus' controlled response, "why are you shaking?" "I - Remus," he whispered, "don't, please." "Don't what Peter, what do you have to hide from us?" Lupin's voice was one Harry recognised; he'd used it the last time he confronted his former friend in Hogsmeade. Harry hoped he never used it on him. "Tell us the truth Peter." "The truth?" "I-" "Tell them Pettigrew," Harry's voice was like stone.

He took a step back. "Remus, James - I had no choice," Pettigrew was visibly shaking, tears glazing his eyes. "I - I mean, I couldn't, he would have killed me -"

"Then you should have died," exploded James, his own wand out with the revelation. "How dare you!" The whisky had fallen to the ground, and his shoes crunched on the glass as he advanced on Pettigrew. "All my life, I've welcomed you into my house, stood up for you at school, treated you like family - we all have - and this is how you repay us? Lying, cheating, spying?"

James was joined by Sirius and Remus as they backed Wormtail under the arch-way into the hallway. "Please," he was whimpering, "please, I'm sorry, so sorry."

"No you're not," stated Lily softly, as she too pulled out her wand. "How long Peter, who else did you betray? The Woods, the Diggorys?"

"Lily - I didn't mean."

"Oh, you didn't mean to?! It was an accident was it?" She was overcome with fury. "It's not some game Peter. You've killed people, real people who aren't coming back, and now guess what? It seems we've stood by and let it happen."

"It's not your fault Lily," said Remus, but she wasn't listening.

"By the powers invested in me as an Aurora to the Ministry," spoke Sirius in an anguished voice, "I hereby place you under arrest for crimes against the government. You have the right to remain silent and the right to a representative in a court of law if you so choose."

Pettigrew was a pitiful sight, crying and shaking as they backed him into the wall. Seamus and Parvati were standing behind Harry, stunned. Hermione sat on the couch, Draco was back to leaning on the fireplace, arms folded and protective.

Harry regarded the situation numbly - like everything since his arrival, it didn't seem real, but it was real enough for these people. But in a way, real enough for him too. This was still a Pettigrew who had betrayed his friends, his Ministry, and caused God knows how many deaths. It was still justice.

Harry sat down with Hermione. She went to take his hand, but though better of it. Too shy or just respectful? Harry didn't know, and to be honest, he was getting tired of trying to figure out this world. In his world, she wouldn't have hesitated.

Remus had conjured government issue handcuffs as Pettigrew took another step back. Would he go to Azkaban? Harry wondered. He

deserves it, he thought.

Then.

"What's going on in here?" Sarah emerged from the study door. Behind Pettigrew.

Seizing his opportunity, he spun round and grabbed the little girl by the throat. "Don't move!" he yelled, thrusting his other hand into his robes. He pulled out his wand and pointed it at her chest. "I mean it!" "Back off, everyone!" cried Lily, whilst James yelled for all wands down, panic in his voice.

"Mum-?" whispered Sarah, her eyes wide with confusion and fright. "It's okay baby, it's okay." But Pettigrew moved away from them to the other side of the hall.

Harry darted to his father's side; he could see Pettigrew's wild state. "James, Lily, I - I'm so sorry," he was desperate, his eyes kept flicking from the windows to the door to the rest of the group under the archway. "You don't understand - he's everywhere, there's no escape-" "Peter, just let her go," said their father as he watched Pettigrew drag the little girl another couple of inches away, "we'll work something out-"

"No!" he cried, "there is no working out. I've failed him, and if I don't redeem myself he'll kill me. With pain."

"Uh oh," came Draco's voice behind them.

"Mum-"

"Good-bye" James."

And then they disappeared.

Chapter  
A Walk In The Park

Four

"SARAH! "screamed Lily, and ran to the spot where they'd been. James did the same, frantically looking around, as if expecting some trace of a clue. Harry fell to his knees. You let it happen again. "It's - it's my fault," he croaked through gasps of air. "What have I done?" "No Harry," said Remus, grabbing his shoulders, "you did nothing wrong."

Behind him, Harry was aware of Seamus steadyng Parvati just as his mother collapsed into James. Sirius ran to them, "hang on Lily," he instructed as she began shaking, choking in air. "My b-baby," she choked, "he - took - my baby." "What are we going to do?" pleaded James, looking to Sirius for an answer.

"The Ministry!" cried Remus, still keeping hold of Harry but turning to face the others in the hallway. "We have to contact them, let them know-"

"You do that and she'll die." Harry turned his head. Malfoy was standing in the middle of the living room. "You!" shouted Sirius, as if he'd only just remembered Draco was there. He let go of the Potters, charged into the living room and grabbed hold of the boy's shoulders, banging him into the wall. "What have you done!"

Malfoy looked shocked. "It's nothing to do with me!" he yelped, "let go of me!" Sirius banged him into the wall again. "What have you done!"

"Get off!"

But Sirius wasn't relenting. "What's wrong with you? She's only a child for God's sake!"

"I don't!"

"She's only twelve, she's just a little girl!"

"I know! " yelled Malfoy and shoved Sirius away from him. "This isn't anything to do with me!"

"You stand in my house," seethed Lily, standing up, pushing herself off James, "you stand there - as a Malfoy - in my house, and claim you have nothing to do with it?"

"Yes!" cried Draco. Harry, having turned himself round, couldn't help but notice how the blond boy winced at the use of the word 'Malfoy.'

"Just let me explain," he continued, holding his hands up protectively, "I promise I can explain."

Lily stopped. "Why are you here," she demanded. Her red hair was wild and fiery, her eyes piercing. Malfoy took a slight step back.

"I - I'm from Freiheit, the Death Eater resistance movement," Malfoy began, getting slightly more confident, "we want Potter's help."

Remus nodded, "we've heard of Freiheit" James cut in. "What do you want with me?"

"Not you," said Malfoy, "Harry, we want Harry."

"What do you mean, Harry?" James asked, confused, "what's he got to do with anything?"

Malfoy raised his eyebrows. "You're not serious, don't tell me you don't know?" He was, however, met with blank stares; apart from Harry, but he didn't have the energy to contribute. Malfoy shook his hand in Harry's direction, "he's Harry Potter" he stated, as if this made everything clear, but he still didn't get the desired response. He looked incredulous. "This is Fudge's finest?" he asked to no one in particular, turning his hands upwards.

"Explain then, boy," growled Sirius.

"My name," said Malfoy pointedly, "is Draco. And I am not your enemy."

"What do you want with Harry, Draco," said Remus diplomatically.

"We want him to defeat The Dark Lord," he said simply, "after that duel with Dumbledore he's weak and we want Potter to-

But he was interrupted by James: "You want WHAT? " he exploded. "Oh Good God," snapped Draco, "no one said anything about explaining anything to you, why the hell don't you know? He's your own son."

"What Malfoy, what!" yelled Parvati "Know what? "

"He's the key! He's the one person in the entire world who can defeat The Dark Lord, that's why he kept trying too kill him."

It was a moment before anyone spoke.

"W-what?" stammered Seamus.

Lily looked like she'd just been smacked in the face with a beater bat.

"Kill him?" she whispered.

"Yes kill him," repeated Draco, "why do you think you had a Secret Keeper fifteen years ago?"

James looked confused, "You-Know-Who was after us-

"No," said the boy in an overly patient voice, "he wanted Harry. You can imagine how pissed he was when he couldn't find him; the sole

person with the uncanny ability to ruin everything, and he's no where to be found?"

"But he found him at Hogwarts, didn't he?" Remus stood up, Harry didn't have the energy to do the same. "He was looking for Harry, not Snape or any of the other students; he found him at Hogwarts and broke the defences in Harry's Second Year, set the Basilisk loose?"

Draco nodded.

"Yeah, I wonder how he managed that?" asked Seamus pointedly in Malfoy's direction.

"No," snapped Lily, "no, we're stopping right here. You," she shook her hand at Malfoy, "are going to explain everything right from the top, starting with whatever you think you know about my son."

"It's not just me, and I don't think, I know." Draco paused to rub his temples, not a planned act, just sheer exhaustion. "Harry is the one - the saviour or something; there's a prophecy or two. Basically, The Dark Lord is Salazar Slytherin's heir, Harry is Godric Gryffindor's. He will be the end of The Dark Lord, just as Gryffindor was the end of Slytherin - unless, of course, The Dark Lord gets there first. That's why he wanted to find him as a baby; no contest."

Now this was news to Harry.

"The heir of Gryffindor?" he repeated disbelieving.

"Amongst other things," was all Malfoy said.

"What!" cried Parvati, "that's impossible, it's just-"

"My son is the heir of Gryffindor?"

"What do you mean?" asked Seamus, "how-"

"How do you know that?" snapped Lupin, "can you prove it?"

"Yes," spat out Malfoy. Before he could question the boy further, Lily interrupted.

"Does that mean," she looked at her husband, "James' family, they were all-"

"No," cut in Draco, a rather disgusted look of his face, "Gryffindor's blood runs in your veins."

"But I'm Muggleborn?" Lily said, unsure, "How can that be?"

"It just is," he sniped. Seamus looked quite pleased, but he didn't say anything.

"Wow," said Sirius in a small voice.

"So," Remus cut in, and Harry took this as his cue to stand up; it was perhaps a little undignified for the saviour of the world to be sitting on the floor he realised. "You think if Harry fights You-Know-Who, now he's weak, he could defeat him."

"We know it," said Malfoy arrogantly. "So what does Sarah have to do with anything?" asked Parvati in a broken voice.

"Ah, that," uttered Malfoy, choosing his words, "like I said before, is nothing to do with me. Just coincidence."

"Explain," growled Sirius again.

"Wormtail was right, he has to redeem himself for blowing his cover-"

"Hang on a second," interrupted Lily, "just tell me - tell me, how long was he- " she couldn't find the words.

"Betraying you?" supplied Draco. Lily dropped her eyes to the floor.

He took that as a yes.

"On and off for about seventeen years," he shrugged, "The Dark Lord would have killed him if he hadn't, Wormtail was right about that." No one had anything to say to that, so Draco carried on.

"So he blows his cover, he has to come up with something so great that The Dark Lord won't kill him right there on the spot." Malfoy rubbed his temples again, "do you mind if I sit down?" he asked.

"You stay right where you are," instructed James harshly.

Draco sighed. "The Dark Lord wants Harry anyway, it's part of some big plot to regain his strength, and it, the plan, came to a head a couple of weeks ago. I don't know the particulars, but basically, the efforts to get Potter have been upped. Wormtail took the girl because he knows Harry will go after her; he'll be responsible for delivering Harry right into his master's hands; redemption achieved."

"So you were here to make sure You-Know-Who didn't get Harry first?" clarified Remus.

"Yes," the blond haired boy replied, "whoever has Potter has the upper-hand, and if you come with me, that means Freiheit have the advantage."

"You're telling us it's a coincidence then?" Harry asked, "you turn up-"

"And you expose Wormtail, yeah," agreed Draco, "it wasn't exactly planned like this. If fact, we thought we'd timed it so he wouldn't be here and blow the whistle on me. I guess we'll have to just deal with that as it comes."

"Assuming Harry's going," pointed out James.

Draco looked really hacked off. "I've told you, he has to go, The Dark Lord is weak, and only Harry can destroy him-"

"But he can also restore him?" said Remus, rubbing the back of his neck with one hand, using the other to gesture. "He's a double-edged knife."

"Yes," conceded Draco slowly, "but that won't happen. Harry will duel and he'll win."

Lily was shaking her head and hand in a defiant sort of way, "you're going to pit my son against one of the most powerful, most dangerous and evil wizards ever to live, when my daughter's already been kidnapped, and expect him to survive? All based on some prophecy?"

"Err." started Malfoy. But Harry cut in. "It's okay mum," he said to her, his throat tight, "this isn't that much of a shock to me, I mean, I really didn't know I was the Heir of Gryffindor or about any prophecy, but Lord Voldemort—" everyone winced and gave Harry a funny look for using that word. He ignored it, "I - think I can do it - rescue Sarah I mean." He didn't want to give too much away, but Harry knew he could do this. He'd done it before. But you haven't always saved everyone, have you? Harry tried to push the doubt away, but it was tenacious. He swallowed and carried on talking, with more than a little effort though. "If Malfoy wants me to go with him, I will; I have to." Draco looked thoroughly relieved. "Can we at least go with him?" asked Lily in a small voice. Draco shook his head, he seemed more confident now that Harry had agreed to go with him; "You all work for the Ministry;" he said, "you've all been tagged. You wouldn't make it ten miles within our perimeter." "But Harry would get in," said Sirius, unsure, "he wouldn't set off any alarms?" "Not the way I'd take him."

Draco was pacing in the hallway. It had taken a long time to persuade the Potters to agree his plan completely, but eventually they had given in, knowing they really had no other choice. James was now sitting on the sofa in the lounge with Sirius, wringing his hands, unsure of what to do with himself. Occasionally he would stand up, make to walk to the study or the kitchen, think better of it, and sit back down again, where Sirius would put a reassuring hand on his shoulder until he sprung back up again. Lily and Remus were sitting at the kitchen table; Lily with her hair pulled back in the scarf once more, Remus with ink smudged on the back of his neck where he kept rubbing it with dirty hands in frustration and exhaustion. They were working on a complex portkey

Draco had grudgingly admitted they needed and he had trouble making; after insisting many times they wanted to be useful, Draco had handed over the instructions saying they would probably be better at it than he would anyway. Harry was no longer in the living room. Once it seemed he was really going to be going with Malfoy he took himself off to his room to make some pitiful effort at preparing himself for what lay ahead. He found a rucksack in the bottom of his wardrobe; he pulled out some rather dirty Quidditch robes and a packet of squished Bertie Botts Every Flavoured Beans and began filling it with food, bottled water, spare clothes, parchment and a quill, Hermione's address for some reason, money, various basic potion ingredients and a feather-light cauldron - just in case. He then pulled on his black coat again, a scarf and some gloves, checked his wand was in his pocket, and took himself downstairs.

When he came to the turn on the staircase he stopped. He could here Lily and Remus talking softly in the kitchen.

"-think it was odd? His behaviour?"

"It might be the concussion."

"But that's the thing; he's been acting so strange since last night."

"How so?"

"Well. when he woke up this afternoon - he was asking all these questions - about school and stuff, like he had amnesia or something - it really scared me, but then I just thought it was his head. But then he goes off for hours without telling us where, and comes back with this girl -"

"Y'know - I meant to ask who she was - the one with all the brown hair?"

"Yeah, well you know as much as we do - pass the quicksilver would you?"

"Do you think it's something sinister then?"

"I honestly don't know Remus."

Harry stopped listening after that. It stuck him as cruel that he'd been given this time with his family, a second chance it seemed, and it was being taken away from him. They were just scared and confused; he felt like he'd infected them.

Harry realised he was staring at the photos on the wall. He stepped back to get a proper look. He saw himself waving on the beach as a small child, him and Sarah opening Christmas and Birthday presents, weddings of people he didn't know (and one that

looked suspiciously like Sirius'), his parents at parties, in the garden, holing him as a baby. There were odd ones Harry recognised from his treasured photo album - his mum and dad's portraits from graduation for example - but he found those weren't actually what had caught his eye. He was looking at a simple shot that looked like it had been taken in a studio with a cream back ground (he recognised the format from Dudley's many photo sessions that Aunt Petunia insisted on). There were four people in the portrait; his family, and it had been taken recently. They beamed at the camera. With out really thinking Harry slipped the photo out of the frame and put it in his pocket. Harry walked the rest of the way down the stairs and into the living room. As he passed Draco in the hall he dropped his bag on the floor and made his way over to the sofa. When his dad saw him, he stood up once more with a concerned expression on his face. He appeared to make a decision, and walked off in the direction of the study. Sirius frowned and went to follow him but Harry caught his arm. "Erm. Sirius, can I talk to you for a sec?" His godfather looked in the direction James had just walked, then decided to follow Harry. They walked into the hallway. Harry looked expectedly at Malfoy who simply stared back, biting a nail. "Uh - give us a second Malfoy, would you?"

Draco bit down tersely on his nail, keeping his eyes fixed on Harry. "Fine," he muttered and walked back into the living room, giving his tattered bag a swift kick on the way, before changing his mind and grabbing the strap and dragging it in with him. "Sirius," started Harry, taking a moment to appreciate the warm look on his godfather's face as opposed to the haunted look it normally showed, "I have to ask you a favour." Sirius' face seemed to brighten a little, "yeah - of course, anything to help Harry."

"I want you to research something, but by yourself; leave my parents out of it, they don't need it." Sirius nodded, so Harry continued, "I you want to look up - um - well, parallel universes - stuff like that." Sirius' eyebrows arched, so Harry carried on quickly so as he wouldn't interrupt, "Hermione - my friend, she can help you, but please, don't tell anyone else. I wouldn't even ask you but I can't really do it myself now, but, well, it's important - so will you do it?" Sirius looked a little dubious; "can you at least tell me why Harry?" "Erm - no."

He sighed. "It's okay Harry, you don't have to tell me - I'll be glad for the distraction anyway." He put his arm on Harry's shoulder, then frowned slightly. "Harry, how did you know?"

"Er - know what?" Harry replied honestly. "About Peter."

"Oh, erm. something Malfoy said." Sirius left it at that. They walked back into the living room. James was standing waiting for them to come back. He was holding what looked like a stick bundled in thick cloth. "Harry," he said, a little breathless and walked over to him, "Harry - uh - this is something Dumbledore entrusted to us a while back - I - I think you should have it. You might need it, that's all." He handed it over to Harry, keeping it horizontal. He took it feeling a little unsure; Parvati sat up in her seat to see what it was, Sirius looked intrigued. Harry pulled the cloth off. It was a sword.

"Er - Dumbledore asked us to keep it - that kind of makes more sense now." James ran his hand through his hair. Harry pulled the scabbard off.

"Gryffindor's sword?" he whispered. "I thought you might need it," said James, " and maybe this." He pressed a wand into Harry's palm. He knew at once who it belonged to. "Give it back to her," whispered James. Harry marvelled at the sword. It had been almost two and a half years since he had last held it in his hands, and yet it was still so familiar. Light, slim, flexible. He felt a ebb of confidence ripple through his chest.

Quietly he sheathed the weapon once more, gave what he hoped was a strong, positive look to his father, then bent down to put Sarah's wand in his bag. Lily and Remus walked into the room; Lily was holding a small globe carefully in her hands. "It's finished," she announced, "but it will need about an hour to stabilise." Draco took it delicately from her hands, and placed it in his robes, "we won't need it for a while anyway," he said to her. Harry could have sworn he looked thankful. He finished securing the sword round his waist, and thought he should probably say something to Hermione about working with Sirius before they left, but Malfoy interrupted the thought. "Right," he said, hauling his satchel off the floor, "we better get going."

"Hang on a minute." It was Seamus. He stood up. "I'm going with

you."

Draco looked quite horrified. "What?"

"I said I'm going with you," repeated Seamus, "I've known Sarah since she was born, and if it was my sister I know how I'd feel, so I'm coming to help. I'm nothing to do with the Ministry either, so there's no reason I should set any alarms off, and I'm good at first aid."

"Seamus love," said Lily with tears in her eyes, her right hand resting on her chest, "you don't have to do this--"

"I think I do Mrs P." She couldn't help but smile.

"Then I'm coming too," cried Parvati, jumping off her chair, "if Seamus goes, I go too--"

"It's not a game for God's sake!" cried Malfoy in disbelief, "this is serious, people might die--"

"And I'm not going to sit around here and wait for it to happen," she snapped, "I'm going with Harry and Seamus and that's final."

"Uh," said a small voice behind them; Harry turned and looked at Hermione. "I'm not particularly thrilled at the idea of running headlong into danger, but I promised I'd help you Harry, and I think I should go too."

"Oh no, Hermione," said Harry and walked over to her, "you can't--"

She shook her head. "We're going to save your sister Harry."

Draco looked sick.

It only took another couple of minutes for everyone to get ready. With enough winter wear between them to clothe a small country they stood in the hallway, where Harry was saying goodbye to his parents.

"Take care, Harry," said Remus, Sirius squeezed his shoulder, his mother hugged him tightly.

"I love you Harry," she whispered in his ear, and he felt his throat clench. His father hugged him also, digging his fingers in slightly. He didn't say anything for a moment, then whispered -

"I'm so proud of you Harry."

For a second, Harry made up his mind not to go. He was tired of being special, he wanted to stay with his mum and dad. But then he thought of Sarah, scared and alone, and realised, as Malfoy had pointed out, that he really had no choice.

Even though his feet felt like they were glued to the carpet, and his eyes were hot and itchy again, Harry took a deep breath and managed a "goodbye, I love you too" before turning on his heals, and walking out the door.

The others followed; Seamus shut the door. It was gone midnight by Harry's watch and it was now truly freezing. He pulled the collar of his coat up and started walking down the path. "Do you know where you're going?" Harry turned round; Malfoy was striding down the path, illuminated occasionally by moonlight shining in between the oak trees which flanked the gravel. "Er.no" he admitted.

"Well perhaps I should lead then, hmm?" Malfoy didn't wait for an answer, he just swept past Harry in an uncanny impersonation of Snape and shoved his hands in his pockets as he walked.

"Bloody idiot," muttered Seamus.

"So where are we going," said Parvati, who scuttled up beside Seamus.

"London," said Malfoy over his shoulder, not bothering to turn round.

"London? " repeated Seamus, stopping in his stride, "but that's miles away! How are we going to-"

"How do you think?"

"Why not just Floo there," interrupted Harry. They were far enough away from the house now that there was far more shadow than light, and it didn't look as if there were any street lamps on the road ahead. Harry felt a little creeped out.

"Do you really think we can walk up to the front door?" snapped Draco, "Where we're going is completely hidden away so the Ministry can't find it. It's unplotable and underground. Even if we weren't sneaking in the back it'd be difficult enough to get there."

"So are we flying in on broomsticks?" demanded Seamus.

"No," said Draco, "we're taking the bus."

"You don't mean the Knight Bus?" Parvati looked genuinely shocked.

"I walked here," clarified Malfoy, "because I had two weeks to do so, and I had to make sure I wasn't spotted. We've only got a couple of hours so we've got to be a little more direct, and it doesn't really matter if we're seen, because they already know we're coming just not which direction we're coming."

"But if the bus conductor recognises you," pointed out Parvati, "he'll report you, immediately-"

"Prejudice git," muttered Malfoy.

"Er - Malfoy, I don't think he's prejudice," said Seamus, disbelieving, "you're a wanted criminal and a traitorous bastard to boot - he'll have every right to report you!"

Draco told Seamus to do something that made Hermione's eyebrows

shoot up. "And I told you not to call me Malfoy," he added. "Oh - pog mo thoin," said Seamus, or something similar at any rate; Harry didn't speak any Irish. They came to the end of the path; they were at a T junction, with the road opposite them stretching out of sight to both the left and the right. There weren't any street lights. Malfoy pulled out his wand and pointed it at his hand; "temporus glamour ritchit." His hand started quite faintly, then strongly, glowing a glittery purple. "A little party trick for you," he said through gritted teeth, then lifted his hand and ran it about an inch above his hair. It turned brown.

"Wow," breathed Hermione from Harry's left shoulder. Visibly shaking now, Draco pulled his hand down slowly over his face, turning his eyes brown also and darkening his complexion (meaning he actually had one now). He then held his hand on his chest where his clothes began to clean and mend - they even changed colour slightly. When, head to toe, the glamour was complete, Draco gasped a deep breath and bent over, resting his hands on his knees; the purple glow was gone. "Quick," he shuddered, his voice slightly lower than normal, "call the bus, it wont last long" Harry pulled out his wand and flagged down the bus like he'd done accidentally two years ago. There was a second of silence, then a familiar ominous sound of engines rumbling out of nowhere. Without thinking he stepped back, pulling Hermione with him.

The triple-decker purple bus came shooting out of nothingness and screeched to a halt right in front of the five of them. Harry was very glad there were absolutely no neighbours around to be woken up, because they certainly would have been. Whilst he and Seamus helped Parvati off the floor where she'd been blasted, a familiar figure jumped off the bus and started reciting the usual blurb; "Welcome to the Knight Bus, emergency transport for the stranded witch or-" but Stan Shunpike didn't get to finish what he was saying; Draco barged past him almost knocking him off his feet. "Yes we know," he spat, and hauled himself up onto the bus. Stan looked a little hurt. "Sorry about that," said Parvati, he's er - not feeling too well." She shrugged her shoulders and went onto the bus behind Malfoy; the others followed. Draco was counting out Sickles in his hand. "Twelve, thirteen, fourteen, there - that's enough for London, yes?" "Certainly sir," said the conductor, "if you'd like to find a bed- but

Draco had already bolted up the stairs. "He's not feeling well," explained Parvati again. "He better not throw up on the linen - it's just been changed." Parvati explained he'd be alright once they were moving and paid her fair as well.

Hermione was looking very shocked. "It's okay," Harry said to her, "I'll pay for you." He pulled out his wallet and found the correct amount of money.

"You do realise it just came out of nowhere, don't you," she said a little shrilly, "I mean it just popped out of the sky, onto the ground." "Come on," Harry grinned. He paid the conductor, then realised it wasn't the same man as before, Ernie Prang. Harry wondered what had happened to him, then steered Hermione up the stairs. Draco wasn't on the second level, and neither were Seamus or Parvati, so Harry and Hermione kept on going. As Harry pushed the trap door up to the third floor, Draco grabbed his coat and hauled him up, "come on" he moaned, and did the same to Hermione. Once they were both through (and sprawled on the floor) Draco slammed the door shut, locked it with his wand, and let the glamour drop. As he melted back to his old self he let out a long relieved sigh; "you have no idea how hard that was," he breathed. "No, and we don't care either."

Draco chose to ignore Seamus. He and Parvati were sitting on one of the beds, Harry pulled Hermione up and they sat on the one opposite. As the bus lurched forward and the scenery changed, Draco flopped on one of the ones further down the isle. He pulled the pillows round his head, squirmed into the covers, hugged his bag to his chest, and was snoring ever so softly within minutes. "He looks like he's been through a lot," said Hermione sympathetically.

"And again," replied Seamus, "nobody cares." "I guess they don't," she agreed sadly, still looking over at the Slytherin boy.

Seamus sprawled out on the bed, "well this is nice," he commented. "Haven't you been on the Knight Bus before?" Harry asked. Seamus shook his head. "I didn't realise you had, Harry," said Parvati. "Once," he told her, "a couple of years ago - I got in a bit of a situation."

"Drunk and Disorderly I bet," said Seamus, not bothering to sit up. Parvati sighed and moved to another bed so she had some room. Harry pulled out his bag, and started rummaging around in it. When he found what he was looking for he straightened up and faced Hermione.

"I wanted to give you this," he said quietly, and gave her Sarah's wand. "It's my sister's, I want you to look after it, I know you're really responsible and all that, and well - you might need it." Hermione looked thoughtfully at the length of wood. "I can't say I'm comfortable taking it," she admitted, "but if you want me to I will." Harry nodded, so she slipped it in her pocket, and lay back against the pillows.

"So, Hermione, what's your story?" Seamus said after a while, he even bothered to sit up, "how do you know Harry?" Harry tensed, but Hermione had it under control. "We're pen friends," she said without pausing, "we met last summer on holiday."

"So why are you here now?"

"Coincidence, Harry asked me to help with some homework."

"I think you got a little more than you bargained for," said Seamus, and fell back down on the bed again. Time passed slowly. Hermione moved to another bed and lay down.

Harry looked out the window for a while. At about half twelve they popped up in a city, and Harry went to stir the others, only to realise it was Cardiff, not London, so settled back down again. Parvati started talking to him in hushed tones a little while later, telling him how sorry she was about every thing, shining her big brown eyes with honest concern. Harry smiled and assured her he was doing okay, really, and she lay back down again.

At just gone ten to one, Malfoy sat bolt upright in his bed with a yell and gasped in a lungful of air. His face was extraordinarily pale as he stared blankly in front of him. Gradually his breathing became regular again and he loosened his death-grip on the blankets. All of a sudden a look of concern crossed his face. He crawled over to Harry's bed and poked him in the head. "Oi, Potter, wake up!"

"I'm awake," said Harry irritably. He hadn't been able to sleep, even though he had wanted to. "What do you want?"

"You have to go down and speak to the driver."

"Why?" he asked sitting, "what for, why can't you do it?"

"Did you miss Finnegan's whole 'I'm an evil bastard' speech?"

"Oh, right."

"You have to go tell him not to take us to London."

"What?" exclaimed Harry, "but I thought you wanted to go to London?"

Draco shook his head, "he'll just assume I meant Diagon Alley, and if he takes us there we'll be spotted. Go tell him to drop us off in St Mary's Street, it's just round the corner from Diagon Alley." He made a motion as if to scurry Harry along with his hands. Harry scowled.

"I'm not a house elf Malfoy."

Malfoy looked uncannily possessed.

"Okay, I'm going," said Harry, throwing his hands up in defeat. As he unlocked the trap door and the blond boy crawled back into bed Harry wondered why there was such an issue over him being called Malfoy; after all, it had never bothered him before.

Harry passed a number of witches and wizards on his way down. None of them would make eye contact with him. He told the driver of the change in direction and he nodded in acknowledgment; Harry wasn't liking this atmosphere very much.

"You alrigh' Harry?" asked Stan from behind his newspaper. Harry glanced at the front in relief as he realised neither he nor his family were on it.

"Yeah, Stan," he replied, tired.

"You're a bit late out 'n about, what choo up to?"

Harry allowed himself a grin, "nothing really, I think one of my friends is up to something though." Stan grinned too and went back to his paper, and Harry went back upstairs.

It wasn't long before they were in London. It took quite a while to wake a protesting Seamus up, and Malfoy had to work up his glamour once more. When they were safely alone Malfoy (his sniping blond self again) led them along various streets down into The Leaky Cauldron, his hood pulled tightly round his face. This was in no way suspicious, as the temperatures were now rapidly approaching artic, and the others were equally huddling up as best they could. The pub was especially dark, and the gaggle didn't look at anyone as they went shivering through to the little courtyard outside. Seamus pulled his wand out and tapped the appropriate bricks in the wall to let them into Diagon Alley. Harry had never visited it before other than in Summer, and he had to say it looked quite different; smaller, darker, dirtier. Or maybe that was how it always looked here?

"Malfoy, where are we going?" demanded Parvati, her teeth chattering.

"Don't call me that you idiot," snapped Draco, "someone might hear." They trudged on. He didn't tell them where they were going. They turned a few corners, passed many closed shops, and then came to a rather unpleasant but unfortunately familiar sight. "Knockturn Alley?" exclaimed Parvati a little highly, "I'm not going down there!"

"No one's forcing you," was all Draco said as he carried on walking down the darkened street. Parvati looked indignant, but settled for a pout as she followed him. Hermione looked apprehensive; "just stick close to me," Harry told her. They passed Borgin and Burkes, the shop Harry had ended up in three and a half years ago by accident; he was pleased that Draco wasn't interested in going into it. They came to a little tea shop called The Botched Brew; it was so uninviting Harry couldn't imagine it got any custom. It was dingy and cramped, and there was a great crack in the glass front. They walked in; the place was empty but there was a teenage girl behind the counter, Harry half recognised her as a Slytherin a few years above his own, but he didn't know her name. "Go ask her for a private parlour," instructed Draco to Hermione. Her eyes widened;

"Why me?" she squeaked. "Because she won't recognise you," he pointed out impatiently from behind his hood.

Hermione walked up to the counter as the others waited anxiously. Draco pulled a loose stitch from his sleeve off, leaving the edge tatty. The girl looked her up and down suspiciously; Harry thought she might have been quite pretty if she wasn't wearing a permanent sneer; she was Asian of some description, Korean maybe, or Mongolian, which he always liked. She flashed a glare in their direction. He pulled his hood down and stopped looking at her. Hermione came back over, looking a little relieved. "She said we can have the card room in the back."

"Good," said Draco, pleased, and walked over to where Hermione had indicated, pulling the door open with a snap. "Should I lock it?" asked Seamus as he came through last and closed the door. The room was, as expected, tiny.

"No point," said Malfoy, pulling the portkey out of his pocket, "we won't be here for much longer." He aimed his wand at the little box

and whispered "avercium"; it began glowing, illuminating their shadows against the walls. "It'll activate in one minute, everyone who wants to come along needs to be touching it then." They all managed to get a couple of finger tips on the box; there was a peculiar humming growing in the air. "Er, Malfoy, is that normal?" Harry asked concerned, as he knew full well it wasn't. Silver sparkles were starting to swirl in the space around them, and the humming was beginning to sound a lot less like bumblebees and a lot more like a stampede of trolls over their heads. They levitated off the floor. "Malfoy!" screeched Parvati. There was an explosion of light, and the feeling of a hook snatching into Harry's stomach took hold as they were yanked out of the little room at The Botched Brew and hurtled off to God knows where. They landed in a dishevelled heap on the ground. There were definitely not inside any more. An evil wind tore right through them, the sky was covered with thick black clouds and snow was falling from every direction. Draco stood up, quite pleased with himself. He smiled, the first real look of pleasure they'd seen on him all night. He put the portkey back in the pocket of his robes, and looked down at the others still on the floor. "Welcome to Germany my friends," he said.

"Germany?" cried Seamus, "what the Hell are we doing in Germany? Where in Germany?" He pulled himself off the ground and Harry did likewise. They looked to be on the outskirts of a pitiful little village not dissimilar from Hogsmead, but a damn sight less inviting. "This," shouted Draco over the wind and pointing down to the village, "is Schwetenburg, not far from Freudenstadt, in the South West of Germany."

Hermione blanched. "So that forest behind it." "Is the Black Forest," he grinned, "home to the Brothers Grimm themselves, as well as a number of other nasty beasties, including a rather reclusive Dark Lord and his hoards of scampering minions." He cocked his head at them and swept his arm in the direction they were looking, "shall we?" Harry felt Malfoy was really enjoying being in charge of the situation for once, but it didn't last long. When they reached the border of the village they were met with shuttered up houses and a coble-stone

road, broken and muddy from lack of care. The wind was flinging thick, wet snow flakes into their eyes and burning their exposed faces. A policeman got out of a decrepit looking car with rust creeping up its edges. He frowned at them and walked over, pulling the collar of his think moleskin coat around his face. "Guten Abend," he said with a patient air of authority, "können Ich Sie helfen?" Harry's eyebrow's shot up; he spoke even less German than he did Irish, which was, in other words, precisely zip. Draco looked as if he was trying to decipher what had been said, but Hermione turned to the others and said, "he wants to know if he can help us."

"Tell him no thank you, we're just passing through," instructed Malfoy, a little peeved that she was apparently better at German than he was. "Nein danke, Wir sind Reisenden und Wir reisen jetzt ab," she pointed through the blizzard at the end of the village where the forest was ominously waiting for them. The policeman frowned again then shrugged his shoulders. "Recht," he said, and walked back to his car, glad to out of the cold. Harry doubted he really cared they were going into the forest, just as long as they didn't cause trouble in his little town. They walked over the mismatched cobles, past houses of sleeping muggles and shops with signs like 'Schlächterei', 'Buchen! Buchen! Buchen!' and 'Moden von Morgen'. Harry wondered what they all meant, but the wind was howling so hard he couldn't ask Hermione. They reached the edge of the forest. Draco looked back over his shoulder to check they weren't being watched then created what looked like a little ball of sunshine. The light and warmth it gave combined with the reasonable shelter of the trees meant the conditions were suddenly a lot more bearable. "Is that a good idea, blearing out our location like that?" asked Seamus, looking at the light that was now hovering above their heads.

"It can only been seen by those within ten feet or so of it, you ungrateful git" said Draco simply and began walking down a slender path between the trees. The others followed. "So, er, what kind of.creatures are we talking about?" asked Hermione, cautiously looking around and between the numerous looming branches.

"Oh, the usual," said Malfoy with wary look to the left. He paused for a second, then carried on. "Centaurs, Unicorns, Gnomes,

Leprechauns, you know, the harmless but annoying ones—"Unicorns aren't annoying," protested Parvati. Draco rolled his eyes; "they are especially attracted to virgins, do you have any idea how embarrassing that can be in social situations?" He considered this for a second. "Or so I'm told," he amended. "But they won't hurt you?" clarified Hermione. "Of course not," said Malfoy, "well, unless you've stolen some Leprechaun's gold, then he'll kill you." Harry wasn't too sure if he was kidding or not. "Dragons, though," he continued, "Werewolves, Kelpies, Graphorns, Trolls, Grindylows, Manticores, Kappas, Griffins, Vampires - they're the ones you should worry about." "Did anyone else notice how much longer that list was than the last one?" said Seamus, looking over his shoulder. Harry just hoped there weren't any giant spiders lurking about. They walked along in silence for a while. Gradually the path widened meaning they no longer had to walk single file; there were odd patches of snow on the ground were it had managed to find its way through the canopy and the wind had eased considerably. They passed through a glade full of flittering, graceful fairies of all sorts of colours, but even that didn't lift the close, creepy feeling that hung about them for long. Every rustle of a branch, every snap of a twig had all of the spinning round on their heals, wands bared. It wasn't a pleasant feeling.

Harry was considering something. "Draco," he said, feeling it was a good move to call him that before asking him something, "does the name Justin Finch-Fletchley mean anything to you?" Malfoy scoffed, "pompous moron, currently residing at Eton by any chance?"

Harry was impressed. "What about Angelina Johnson, er - Colin Creevey, Penelope Clearwater?" Draco stopped and turned round to face him. "Athletic and good at potions; son of a milkman, likes photography, good at charms; smart mouthed but reserved, clever with dragons and the like." He raised an eyebrow, "why do you want to know?" "Who are all these people?" asked Parvati. "Muggle born witches and wizards," replied Harry. "I'm impressed," he admitted to Malfoy, "how do you know all that?" He scoffed again, and carried on walking, talking over his shoulder; "I had to learn it off by heart, they reckoned it would be useful; you wouldn't even believe the amount of names I have floating round my

head." He started ticking them off on his fingers; "Orla Quirk, West Indian, has ADD but good at Astronomy; James Falcon, another one good with the charms, poor but a talented diviner; Tobias Jacque or "TJ" Phillips, athletic, good at transfiguration and handy if you don't have a bottle opener to hand." He grinned in the fake sun light, "I could go on for hours you know?" "And that's how you knew Hermione was Muggle-born?" asked Harry? He then looked quickly to his left holding up his wand. He was convinced he'd heard something, but there was nothing. Malfoy scowled, "knew, Christ, we practically had her name tattooed on our foreheads, why the Hell Dumbledore didn't make an exception and let her into Hogwarts I'll never know." He took a quick look at Hermione, before biting at his thumbnail and staring through the trees once more as he walked on. Parvati looked at her too. "So, she's a good witch?" "Try 'the best' witch," said Draco. This time he didn't look at her. "I am here, you know?" said Hermione quietly to Harry. He grinned at her, and she grinned back. After a while they came to the edge of a small lake and stopped; Draco looked left, then right, then scratched the back of his head. Oh we are so lost thought Harry. Parvati looked worriedly behind them, Hermione had her wand out in anticipation, but once more there was nothing. The girls stuck close together. Seamus lent against a tree and pulled out a packet of cigarettes and a lighter; Harry was quite shocked. "You smoke?" he asked before he could help himself. "Oh, don't start Harry," said Seamus with a role of the eyes. He bit at the end of one of the cigarettes and lit it behind cupped hands. "I'd kill for a fag," said Draco darkly, staring out across the lake. Seamus lent forward and offered him one from the packet; Harry suspected he wasn't willing to chance whether or not Draco was kidding about the whole killing part. "Thanks," he said a little surprised. He grinned; "you haven't poisoned it have you?" "Why don't you smoke it and find out?" Something stirred in the middle of the lake. What looked like a horse poked its head above the surface and snorted. "Ooh, horsie!" squealed Parvati before she could help herself. She went to step closer to the lake. Draco flung his arm out and caught her sharply in the stomach. "Ow!" she cried and stepped back, "what did you do that for?"

Malfoy turned to face her and sneered. "Fine, if you want to go off and have a nice death with your new found Kelpie, be my bloody guest you sap." He gave her a look of utter disgust, spun around, came to a conclusion that left was the way he had wanted all along and stalked off back into the trees. Parvati looked quite hurt, "I didn't know," she said to Harry. Seamus flicked his half finished cigarette to the floor and stepped on it. "I've had enough of this crap," he said and walked off in the direction Malfoy had gone. Harry looked at the two girls in the dimming light (their ball of sunshine had followed Malfoy) and shrugged. The three of them went after Seamus. After a short, steep hill, the path widened once more, leading them through thick trees in a straight line that seemed to go for quite some time. Draco was striding on a little way ahead, tugging at his frayed bag strap as he walked, barely visible now they were out of the light's range; Seamus had stopped at the top. "I'm gonna kick his fekking head in," he said simply to them, then started once more after the Slytherin boy. "Oi, Malfoy, you git!" he called. Malfoy turned to face them but kept on walking backwards. "I told you not to call me Malfoy," he called back sharply, then turned round again. "I'm talking to you!" yelled Seamus, and ran in front of Draco, holding his hand out to stop him from going any further. "I'm sick of your constant bullshit," he cried, poking a finger at his chest, "we're doing you a favour and all you do is—" but Draco just side-stepped him, snapping; "If we don't keep moving we wont make it before dawn, and then, quite frankly, we'll be screwed, so if you want to whinge at the back of my head, be my bloody guest." He pulled once more at the damaged strap, head looking purposely at the floor, and carried on walking. Seamus grabbed his arm and spun him forcefully around. "I have no reason not to kick nine bells of crap out of you Malfoy," he seethed. Malfoy's jaw clenched. "Shut up!" he barked, but Seamus just increased his grip on the boy's arm and yanked him a little closer. "Neville Longbottom, Malfoy? Sound familiar?" Malfoy paled, and pulled against Seamus but he held on. The others stayed a little back, but still close enough to see very clearly what was happening, the light visible to them once more. "No?" carried on Seamus, eyes flashing with hatred, "how about Karl Beardmore? Seth Goldsmith?"

Candice

Longham

?"

Draco strained against Seamus' grip, "SHUT UP!" he yelled, "JUST SHUT UP!" But Seamus wouldn't give up. "No Malfoy, I think you need to be reminded of this, Malfoy, so you stop treating us like shit you righteous bastard. "It wasn't my-"  
"Stephanie Perkins, Hannah Abbot, Mackenzie Jordan? "  
"No!"

"She was a Slytherin for God's sake!" Malfoy finally pulled away, putting his hands on his head. "You don't know anything!" "I know those people died and it was your fault! They were half-bloods - like me! You can't just switch teams and forget about it! " "My father told me to do it! " screamed Malfoy, "he made me, you don't know anything! Harry was stunned, he had never seen Malfoy like this before. He gasped a lungful of air, "you don't know what it was like," he cried, "you don't argue, you just die, and I trusted my father, I didn't know it would happen! "

"You coward! " screamed Parvati. Hermione jumped and looked at the girl next to her. She had a slender pearly tear slipping down her cheek. "I heard it!" she yelled, trembling, "I had to hide in a broom cupboard whilst people outside died! Do you even care?!"

"I'm sorry," stammered Draco, right arm hugging across his chest and neck, left grasping his bag, "I'm so-"  
"You apologise to me and I will kill you," hissed Parvati venomously. "Then what the HELL do you want from me?!" he screamed back at her, flinging his hands out. Parvati snapped. She lunged at him, pushing him off the path. Draco's eyes snapped open in shock, he tripped over his feet, and went crashing down out of sight. Hermione gasped, Harry ran to the edge and looked down. The sunshine had decided this time to stay with them, and Harry could see that the path dropped away into a step slope.

He looked at the others; Parvati was panting, her hand over her mouth in shock. There was a distinctive curse as Draco presumably came to a stop somewhere out of sight. Harry rubbed the back of his head. "I'm sorry Harry," said Seamus, "I didn't mean to go off on one, this is about Sarah, not him."  
"Yeah," agreed Parvati quietly, "I didn't mean to try and kill him." Harry shook his head, "it's okay, just wait here whilst I go get him." They nodded and he started making his way down, holding on to the

odd tree for support, his wand illuminated in front of him. Draco had come to a halt about ten feet down. By the look of it his bag had finally given up the goat and torn right open, its contents spilled in every which direction. Draco had his elbows propped on his knees, his head in his hands. "You alright?" asked Harry. Malfoy's head snapped up as if he hadn't heard Harry coming. He got up hastily and started picking up socks and books off the forest floor by the light of Harry's wand. "Why would I care what some Paki thinks of me?" he said harshly without looking at Harry. Harry let the rudeness of the remark hang for a moment or two before speaking once more. "I appreciate what you're doing for me y'know, for Sarah." Draco slid his eyes in Harry's direction. "I could be wrong, but I think you're the only one," he said before rooting under a host of frozen leaves for a water bottle. He placed it on the pile he was making then picked up the old bag to add some stitches to the tear. "Well, aren't you going to ask?" He looked straight at Harry.

Harry frowned, "ask what?"

The other boy shook his head slightly and gave half a resentful smile. "Why I did it?" This threw Harry for a second. He thought maybe Malfoy had worked out he didn't come from this world, that the events that had just been described were new to him, but then he realised he was talking a little deeper than that. He shrugged his shoulders. "I guess your parents can be your whole world when you're young."

"That they can."

They didn't say anything for a while after that. Harry watched Draco picking up his things; he offered to help but was told sharply where to go. Harry had always thought Draco to be so neat and fussy back in the real world, but here most of his possessions were old and tatty, especially his clothes which Harry thought really shouldn't have been possible.

After a while in thought Harry spoke. "She's not from Pakistan you know."

Malfoy didn't bother looking round. "What?" he said sharply, scrabbling about for more of his missing stuff. "Parvati," explained Harry, "her family isn't from Pakistan - you called her a Paki, but she's Indian."

"So," snapped Draco, his jaw gritted at the distain of making small talk, "what does it matter?"

"Well, they're - I don't know - two different countries, and they're kind of at war; they have two totally different religions and-" Malfoy scoffed. "Bloody religion, causes nothing but trouble." Harry raised an eyebrow, "you're not religious then." Malfoy finally looked at him properly. "You're asking me two questions Potter," he said and flung a shirt into his half mended bag. "The answer to the first is that my family has been traditionally French-Catholic - and by traditionally I mean guilt laden and narrow minded - for as long as you'd care to remember. What I think you really want to know is, no - I don't give a good God damn about anything I can't touch, see or hear. Religion is just gibberish that people made up centuries ago to make them selves feel better about dying."

Harry had never quite thought about it like that before. "So you don't believe in Heaven then?"

His back stiffened. "No," he said evenly. Harry thought back to last summer; "your mother's coming Harry - she wants to see you." He smiled to himself.

"I do."

"Will you just shut up!?" yelled Malfoy, grabbed his now full bag, and stormed off back up the slope. Harry looked at him in shock - what the Hell had that been about? Harry followed him, he reached the top to find Seamus, once more, yelling at Malfoy's back. "What the Hell is your problem!?" he called. But Malfoy kept walking. "This boy's gonna be the death of me," he said to Harry, then went to catch up with the Slytherin boy again, "hey, come back here - we need to talk you selfish-"

But then something happened that Harry would never have expected. Not in a million years. Even if he'd sat down, really thought about it, written an essay or two and had Hermione check them over, he still never would have guessed what came next. Malfoy stumbled over his own feet, sank to the floor, entangled his fingers through his filthy hair, and began to cry.

Everybody froze.

And within a second or two it was more than crying; Draco Malfoy was sobbing, inconsolably. Parvati looked at Harry with wide, disbelieving eyes, but he was equally as lost for words. It wasn't like Harry had never seen Draco cry before; anyone would have been forgiven for thinking the boy had been mortally wounded when Beaky the Hippogriff had slashed his arm back in their third year the fuss he

had made. But this was so entirely different. His shoulders were shaking with grief and remorse, tears were spilling down his face, leaving trails in the grime, he was having trouble breathing. It wasn't noisy or messy though, but it was obviously both deep and very painful.

Hermione walked gingerly up to Draco. A shaft of moonlight had snuck its way between the branches and was illuminating his already pale face. She put her hand gently on his shoulder; "are you okay Draco," she said softly.

He pulled his fingers out of his hair and rested them over his eyes. He sucked in a shaky breath of air and gasped "you don't understand." He didn't shrug off Hermione's hand which Harry was surprised at. She crouched down next to Draco. "I know I don't understand, can't you tell me?" Harry was a little surprised that Hermione was handling the situation so well; after all she was normally better at getting things done in a practical, logical way rather than giving hugs. But then Harry realised that was exactly what she was doing - without Malfoy they couldn't get to where they were going, and in order to trust him they needed to understand him. Malfoy rested his palms on his temples and closed his eyes; his sobbing had eased slightly. "I - I don't understand - so how can you? They.she didn't know, and they didn't give her a chance - she just thought-"

"Who Draco, what are you talking about?" "He wanted to - to take out some orphanage, some personal kick - but nobody warned her - said anything!" He broke into a fresh wave of grief, screwing up his eyes as if against some blinding light. "My father didn't say anything - just agreed, didn't care, stupid selfish bastard, I hate him! They killed her and he didn't care - she just said it and they didn't give her a chance, he just killed her and he didn't care." He rubbed tears away angrily, bending over closer to the ground, swaying back and forth. Hermione looked back at Harry and the others and bit her lip. Draco suddenly spun out of her grip, snapping her hand back and jumped up to face the others. "You stand there and judge me," he yelled at Seamus, "but you've got no God damn idea what it was like! I - I knew people died, but my father said th-they deserved because they failed him, but all she did was try and save those kids and he - killed her.no talking, just dead, forever." He steadied himself and grasped his hair again. "Everything he said was a lie, I listened to him and did

what he wanted me to and it was a lie! I - I never. you don't know, and now I'll never see her again-"  
"Voldemort killed your mum - didn't he, that's who you mean" said Harry, knowing he was right. Everything Draco was saying he'd felt, he recognised his own voice saying. "That's why you're helping us."  
"But I can't make it better," cried Draco, pitifully, and sank to the forest floor. Harry stepped across to him and said quietly; "I know what you're going through, I'm so sorry." Draco took another shuddery breath and looked at Harry. Before he knew what hit him he lunged at Harry and smacked his head into the floor. "You've got some perfect little life and you're standing there telling me you know, you understand, how about you f-" but Seamus had him in a full on tackle, rolled him to the floor. Draco swung and caught him with a right hook, tears still streaming down his face. He went for Harry again, but he grabbed hold of the blond boy without much effort and they both fell to the ground. Draco stopped struggling. He simply curled himself up in a ball, exhausted, and wept. Harry sat up, panting, and lent himself against a tree. The others looked at him in shock.  
"I think we all could do with a break," he said limply.

They all found a spot to sit and rest for a while. Parvati was talking with Hermione quietly, they were getting to know each other from what Harry could tell. Seamus had come over and lent on Harry's shoulder for a while, and the two boys laughed a little hysterically at the situation they now found them selves in. Seamus was now resting against a tree on the opposite side of the path, dozing. Harry had got the sword his dad had given him out in his hand, it made him feel better for some reason. Draco was sitting a little further off than the others. He'd propped himself up, exhausted and fallen into an uneasy sleep. Before he had though, he'd given Harry a look; it hadn't lasted very long, but it said something Draco himself couldn't say - thank you. Harry stared through the branches of the trees at the stars above. It seemed like the storm had eased. Ron came and sat next to him. "How you doing Harry mate?" he said looking up at the stars too. Harry suppressed another half hysterical laugh, "you have no idea." Ron laughed with him. "You'll be alright you know, you're doing the right thing, you all are." "It doesn't make it any easier," pointed out Harry.

"Yeah, well," said Ron, "you've done worse - a whole year of Lockhart's Defence Against the Dark Arts for one thing." Harry laughed again.

"Yeah, and Professor Trelawney's Divination." Ron grinned and looked over at Hermione who was still talking in a tired but quite happy way with Parvati.

"It's too bad about Herm hey?"

Harry shook his head, "I hope I did the right thing, telling her everything." "Are you mad?" cried Ron, "of course you did, Hermione always wants to know everything about everything, and then she goes and looks it up in her definitive encyclopaedia to the world just to check she's got it perfect."

"Yeah," agreed Harry, "I guess you're right."

"I always am."

"Apart from Draco being the heir of Slytherin."

"I believe that was your idea, not mine."

"What about"

"Shutting up would be a good idea now."

Harry laughed and punched Ron on the arm. Ron gave him a good, reassuring slap on his knee and stood up. "Well, you'd better get going," he looked down at Harry. "Don't forget about me will you?" Harry gave him a stern look. "I'd never forget about you, pillock."

"You need to wake up now, Harry."

"Ron-"

"Harry!"

Harry snapped awake. Hermione was staring at him, her hand on his shoulder. "You were sleep talking," she said in a sympathetic tone. Harry rubbed his eyes, then suddenly thought to check his sword. It was still there.

"Lets get going," he said to her in a tired voice. They rounded everyone up, and began along the path again. Draco led the way, slightly ahead of everyone else, no longer upset but thoughtful. Harry was worried he might have been embarrassed, but he was fine about earlier, if anything, he seemed more human. They walked along in silence for a good long while, only broken when Seamus handed out some liquorish wands for them to eat. There was one tense incident with a rather vile smelling troll, but it walked on with out noticing them after a minute or two. Harry looked at his watch Sirius had given him for his birthday; it was getting near three in the morning. All at once Malfoy stopped and held

his hand up to signal the others to do likewise - just like in those poxy army movies Dudley liked so much. "I think we're almost there," he hissed.

"How can you tell," said Seamus looking round. Harry could see his point - this part of the forest looked exactly the same as what they had been walking in for the last half an hour. Draco turned to look at them, a sort of gleam in his eyes. "Because I can smell the Vampires," he whispered simply.

Chapter  
That Frying Pan And Fire Thing

Five

"Vampires?" said Parvati meekly. Things were getting better and better as far as Harry was concerned. Yeah, right. Draco pulled open his wreck of a bag and took out a couple of stakes. "Vampires," he clarified, "they patrol the perimeter, useful as they're not likely to take a bribe unless it has a pulse - surely you can smell them?" "If you mean that illustrious combination of three week old fish and burnt rubber tyres," asked Seamus, "then that would be yes." "I'd say we have about five minutes, have any of you slayed a vampire before?" Hermione looked at Parvati, who exclaimed in a rather high pitched voice; "Slayed one? I've never even seen one!" Draco threw the two girls a stake each, "stake through the heart, sunlight, a little Holy Water - it's like falling off a log." "Cool," said Seamus as Draco gave him a vial of Holy Water along with an ornate stake (avoiding eye contact though, Harry noticed). "So - we get to be like Buffy?" He was met with blank stares, except Hermione who gave a small grin. "C'mon?" he cried, "Kirsty Swanson, '93 - that movie kicked arse!" Draco raised an eyebrow. "I have got to get some more Muggle friends," said Seamus shaking his head and pocketing the Holy water. "You're the one that said it," said the blond boy distractedly. Harry unsheathed his sword. "Decapitation works, right?" Malfoy nodded and reached behind his back over his shoulder to uncover his own sword. Where the Hell did that come from, wondered Harry. "I only have one crucifix," apologised Draco. It didn't go unnoticed by Harry that it was given to Hermione. Seamus pulled at something around his neck; Harry couldn't see what it was. "Keep looking, they could be-" But Draco didn't get to finish his sentence. "Look out! " screamed Parvati as a hideous creature leapt out of the tight foliage behind Draco. He spun at the sound of her voice (on what Harry could only assume to be trained reflexes) and caught the vampire in the torso with the sword. The smell was almost overpowering now, making Harry gag. Draco swung the silver blade in a tremendous arch, severing the vampire's head and turning it

instantaneously into dust.  
"Spread out!" yelled the blond boy, his eyes shining. He looked alive.

Harry turned on his heals and came face to face with a vampire of his own. Her canine teeth were elongated to a deadly point, her eyes flashed red; she hissed and swiped the air with her clawed nails. Harry dodged just in time and lunged amateurishly with the sword, impaling her just below her shoulder. She screamed with a sound of nails on a chalkboard and Harry heaved the sword out of her. Throwing all his strength into it, he tried to mimic Malfoy and cut it's head off. However, he hadn't had quite as much practice as Draco at the art of vampire slaying, and consequently, the blade became stuck halfway through the creature's neck. "Ugh!" cried Harry as blood spurted out in all directions, causing the vampire to scream even more and lash out in fury. Harry pulled at the lodged weapon, freed it, and took a second swing. This time his aim was true; the female vampire exploded in a cloud of dust. He spun round, panting, terrified. He saw the two girls working as a team, using their stakes and only crucifix to corner then attack one vampire, then another. A second vampire charged Harry; this one he was able to defeat far swifter than the last. Somehow he didn't feel his luck would hold.

They were filthy creatures, Harry noticed, rotting in the clothes they were buried in, caked in mud, grime and what suspiciously looked like dried blood. Add the fact they were technically dead and it was no wonder they stank.

A vampire threw himself at Seamus, who in turn flew towards him. The vampire suddenly recoiled, and in such a defenceless state the young Irish boy was able to stake him easily. Harry took a moment to puzzle over that before being tackled round the waste by another foul-smelling beast.

Harry smacked into the forest floor and the vampire clawed at him, trying to bite his neck. Harry yelled and tried to heave him off, but it wasn't working, he was too strong. The odd angle at which Harry's sword had fallen in his hand rendered it useless, no matter how much he twisted and turned. Just as the creature got his fangs within biting distance of Harry's neck, it burst into foul-tasting dust. Harry managed to spit out most of what he'd inhaled. "Thanks Draco," he said, spitting again, and the boy who had come to his rescue helped him up.

The vampires were considerably diminished in numbers now; those snaking through the trees were less and less. Harry even found a moment to break a sizable branch off a nearby Pine and staked a couple more bloodsuckers, choosing to rest the sword and aching right arm for a moment. Draco and Seamus actually worked together at one point to slay a particularly nasty female vamp who looked like she wrestled dragons for a living. The task done though, they turned their backs on one another once more, without even an acknowledging look between them. After a while Harry dared to think they were winning; there seemed to be no more vampires left. Suddenly there was a pitiful squeal of "don't hurt me!" from behind Harry's back. He spun round to see where the voice came from. Draco was frozen, the blade of his sword mere inches away from the neck of a small boy hidden in the shadows. "Please don't hurt me!" he repeated again.

Harry guessed he was only about five or six years old, and he was blatantly terrified. "I'm not one of them," he called out to Draco who stood so much taller than him, "they took me, from my bed - I w-want my mum." The little boy burst into desperate sobs, and Harry instantly felt a pang of sorrow for him. He didn't even think about the fact the boy was speaking English and not German. Draco slowly lowered his sword. "You were kidnapped?" he asked the child. He nodded; "By the monsters - will you find my mum? Please? I - I can't find her and I don't like it." He wiped his eyes on the sleeve of his navy blue coat.

"Oh," said Parvati sympathetically, and walked over to the little boy. "Don't worry, we'll help you find your mum, where?" But before she could finish what she was saying, the boy leaped cat-like out of the shadows and was on Parvati in a flash, knocking her down and tearing at her neck. She screamed, but Draco swung with his sword, decapitating the child before any harm could befall her. Parvati lay gasping on the ground, covered in a fine film of softly falling dust. Hermione had dropped her stake; she picked it up again with a trembling hand. "Sneaky bastard," said Draco, wiping the blade of the sword on his cloak, and turned his back to Parvati, scouting off ahead. His face was set. Seamus ran to Parvati who was shivering on the cold ground. "Are you okay?" he asked, shaken. She nodded.

"I - I just thought he was a little boy?" she stammered, "I thought we'd help him."

"Doesn't always work out like that," said Harry listlessly. Hermione looked at him with wide eyes and gulped silently, but Harry had no more to say, nothing to comfort her. They helped Parvati to stand before following Draco. Parvati kept a hold of Seamus in her shock; limping where she'd managed to catch her ankle on a tree root and bleeding slightly at the neck. Seamus himself had a nasty gash on his right temple and was staring fixedly ahead. Hermione walked closely beside Harry; she was still fingering the stake. Harry felt pity for them - this was the first time they'd really had to fight in their lives. He got the feeling it wouldn't be their last.

It wasn't long before they arrived in a relatively small clearing, ending in a ancient looking stone archway leading into a sort of rock face, and presumably underground. There had been no further sign of the vampires, but sitting calmly under the stones was a beautify groomed, evenly poised, sphinx. "Uh oh," Harry said under his breath. "Good day to you," said the sphinx, crossing her two front paws as if she was settling down to a good evening's entertainment. "Do you seek entrance to what lies beyond?" This sphinx looked more or less the same as the one Harry had met in the maze last summer; the face of a woman, with the body of a lion. The only difference was that this sphinx was if anything slightly larger than the last, and her eyes were far darker. "Er - yeah." said Seamus, before Draco could answer. "I mean - yes.ma'am." He looked at Harry, cocking his eyebrow; Harry got the feeling Seamus was reluctant to give Draco back his leadership role quite so soon after the debacle of the last hour. Draco sighed, not taking his eyes off the creature. "She is a sphinx, you moron," he said slowly under his breath. "I suggest you not insult her, those claws aren't there just to look pretty." He stepped forward into front of the others and spread his hands wide; an open gesture of honesty. "We do seek entrance, and if the lady would be so kind as to give us her clue, we would be happy to guess." His face then broke into the most amazing smile, transforming his whole demeanour. Harry couldn't quite believe it was the same Draco. "We have to answer a riddle?" asked Hermione. Harry nodded. The sphinx had sat herself up straight; she stared at them all, tilting

her head slightly. "You may pass if you answer my riddle," she clarified. "If you answer on your first guess I will let you pass. If you guess incorrectly I will attack. If you choose not to answer, I will let you back silently away; unscathed."

Seamus gulped.

"May we hear the riddle?" asked Draco, an unknown air of charm in his voice.

The sphinx returned his smile, and began her clue:

"In	a	marble	hall
As	white	as	milk
Lined	with	a	skin
As	soft	as	silk
Within		a	fountain
Crystal			clear
A	golden	apple	doth
No	doors		there
To		this	
Yet	thieves		stronghold
To steal the gold."		break	in

"That's it?" Parvati didn't look too hopeful.  
"And this is the only way into You-Know-Who?" said Seamus to Draco.

He made eye contact with the Irish boy for the first real time all night.  
"Well you can go ring the front doorbell if you want?"  
"Gold, and golden apple - does she mean Gringotts maybe?" suggested Harry quietly, looking warily at the creature.  
"I thought maybe some sort of temple?" said Parvati, her voice still shaky.

"Maybe Greek - with the marble?"  
"Would you keep your voice down," snapped Draco.  
"Err - what about the Garden of Eden? With the apple and stealing stuff." Seamus shrugged his shoulders.

"Azkaban?"

"Silk.clothes? India - Far East-"

"Alcatraz?"

"What about the fountain bit-?"

"The white milk bit might mean innocence - that could go with the Garden of Eden thing?"

"No, I think-"  
"It's an egg."

Harry and the others stopped talking and turned round. Hermione, who had been silent, now addressed the sphinx. "It's an egg, isn't it?" Harry's breath caught in the back of his throat. "Er.might we have a discussion before we answer the nice big monster? " cried Seamus in a small voice, no more than a hiss. Hermione blinked. "I thought everyone knew this one - the golden apple is the yolk, the silk is the shell and 'thieves break in', well that's how you eat the egg isn't it - by breaking it open." Harry tried to recall the riddle to see if this made sense, but he needn't have. The sphinx smiled graciously and stood up, leaving the way clear for the five of them to walk through. "That was good," said Draco honestly to Hermione as he went past her, taking the lead. Hermione couldn't help but smile. They traipsed wearily down a flight of stone steps for a good long while; Harry was reminded of his secret tunnel into Honeydukes and he smiled too. They reached the bottom of the stairs and stared down a sparsely lit stone tunnel; their ball of sunshine had burnt itself out. The walls dripped with water and the floor was uneven in places; a stiff breeze blew against them. Harry lit his wand, the others followed suit. "This is it now," Draco informed them, "this tunnel will take us where we need to go, we just have to get through all the jinxes and curses and so on-"  
"Jinxes?" said Seamus alarmed, catching up with Draco. Unfortunately, the word was barely out of his mouth before a shot of turquoise light basted out of the stone somewhere above them and hit the Irish boy square on the chest. He slammed into the ground, skidding a good few meters before coming to a halt in a crumpled heap. "Seamus! " screamed Parvati, and ran to him. Draco swore loudly and shook his head. He didn't seem too concerned though. "I thought that was further on," he muttered as he walked back over to Seamus. Harry and Parvati were helping him up. Although dazed, he didn't appear to be harmed. "Don't worry Harry," he said smiling, "I'll be fine, bumps and bruises heal with time." A frown appeared on his face as Parvati and Harry let go of him so as he could stand by himself. Draco cocked an eyebrow at him, as if waiting for him to understand something. "That was quite a hefty blast," Seamus said slowly, looking sideways,

concentrating on the words, "I hope that it will be the last." His eyes snapped wide open in shock and he clapped both his hands over his mouth. "Is it me, or do you find, that all I say comes out in rhyme?!" he cried in dismay.

"It's called the Fiddledess curse," explained Draco, actually talking to Seamus without the usual lacing of rancour. "It, as you say, will make everything you say come out in rhyme, but it wont hurt you - I think it's just supposed to annoy you to death."

"I never knew there was a curse, that made a person speak in verse," lamented Seamus, shaking his head as they started walking again. "Not only rhyme - but couplets too - what's a man supposed to do?!" Hermione tried to hide a giggle behind her hand, which naturally set Parvati off. "Oh - I see - you think it's quaint, I'm here to tell you now it ain't," sulked Seamus.

Harry couldn't help but agree with the two girls though; it was funny to hear Seamus, usually quite blokeish, reciting poetry every time he opened his mouth. Seamus went to say something else, but stopped himself angrily, not wanting to let any more rhymes escape. Harry grinned. "So," he said to Draco, walking beside him, "how long does this thing go on for," indicating the passage-way. Draco shrugged. "I've never walked it myself, so maybe a couple of miles - I'm not sure." Seamus, again, went to speak, but stopped himself, obviously not wanting to suffer the indignity. "And it's covered in booby-traps?" Harry carried on oblivious to Seamus. The girls were whispering together, although cold, they were surprisingly relaxed, probably due to the humorous nature of Seamus' curse, and the fact they had defeated both the vampires and the sphinx. Parvati was limping slightly less as well. Harry couldn't help but feel they were only just getting started. Draco nodded, "yeah, all sorts of things. In fact," he drew his sword, "there might be something coming up ahead, if memory serves." He squinted into the gloom; "we've just had a spell, so- But once more, they were caught out again. The ground suddenly gave way underneath both Draco and Harry and they tumbled into a deep pit. "Stratifus!" yelled Harry and a glowing net shot out of his wand, catching the two boys just in time. He looked through the loops in the net to see a cluster of metal spikes of various lengths poking out of the floor. Draco swore again and held his sword high above his head so as not to sever any of the netting holding them precariously in place.

"Harry!" cried Hermione, and her face, along with Parvati's and Seamus' appeared at the top of the pit. "Are you okay?" "Yeah," replied Harry, "no worries." "Oh, crikey, good thinking Harry," said Seamus, looking at the net. He then made a rather pained face, as if trying not to speak, but eventually gave in; "you could have ended up chop suey." He then wrinkled his nose with distaste. Parvati gave him a look, "that wasn't a very good rhyme Seamus," she said in a disapproving voice. Seamus raised his eyebrows pointedly, and gave her a look which clearly stated that he would rather not be rhyming at all, thank you very much. Harry smiled to himself and started thinking of a way he and Draco could get back up the pit, which was a good few meters straight up, without hurting themselves any more.

Parvati thought of it for them though. "Wingardium Leviosa!" she cried, and the two boys came shooting out of the pit and landed haphazardly on the other side of the path. "Cheers," managed Draco though gritted teeth, and picked himself up quickly, brushing dust off his already filthy clothes. Harry didn't see the point in that, but didn't say anything to him either. The two boys carried the other three over the pit using the rather wonky but effective levitating spell.

They carried on walking, apprehensive of what they would face next. Seamus said to Draco; "so what other traps are there here." And once more had a moment or two of personal strife before succumbing to the rest of the rhyme; "just so I know what I'm to fear." He rolled his eyes in despair, and Harry did actually feel quite sorry for him. "C'mon Draco," he called out to the blond boy ahead when he ignored him, "do please tell, surely there's a counter-spell?" "Oh yeah," said Draco nonchalantly, half turning around as he walked, "I'm just having trouble remembering it, that's all," he added with a sly grin.

"What!" yelled Seamus, "that's not fair! This is more annoying than I can bare!" He rounded on Draco; "if I keep talking, then you'll see, just how evil I can be. I could go on for hours, maybe until you're pushing flowers." He folded his arms.

Draco rolled his eyes; "you're going to annoy me to death?"

"You did say it yourself," pointed out Harry.

Draco shook his head, "I promise Finnigan, as soon as I remember it, I'll give you the counter curse." Seamus looked daggers at Draco,

convinced he was letting him hang on purpose, but kept himself from saying anything.

"So - you know what's coming next?" Harry asked Draco.  
"Not exactly."

Parvati stopped talking with Hermione, overhearing what Draco had said. "What do you mean 'not exactly'? I thought you knew it all - I thought you were guiding us through!"

Draco gave her a tired half look before continuing on up ahead. "These things change all the time - I know what it all looked like when I left - but that was three weeks ago."

"Oh God!" said Parvati in a disgusted voice, and snatched angrily at a cobweb around her head.

"Well actually, it makes perfect sense," reasoned Hermione, "it prevents anyone doing exactly what we're trying to do - using an insider to get in. Well, tries to at least."

"Exactly," said Draco again.

Parvati dropped back, not wanting to walk with Hermione after she had defended Draco, and talked quietly with a sulky expression on her face to Seamus who nodded occasionally. Hermione seemed quite content to walk by herself though. She was examining the wand Harry had given her with gloved fingers and studying the rock in the wall from time to time.

Harry fell in step next to Draco and once again found himself marvelling at just how different this boy was to the one he'd grown up with. Firstly, he appeared to have joined a cause which not only rebelled against the most powerful wizard in the world, and Malfoy always loved those with the power, but it also fought for the good of the common man. As far as Harry knew, all Malfoy thought the common man was good for was wiping the soles of his boots on. Harry thought it maybe came down to the fact that this Draco seemed capable of a broader way of thinking. And capable of change.

"Draco," said Harry, "can I ask you something?"

"If you must Potter," he replied whilst looking carefully at one of the torch brackets. When he seemed happy he moved on. Harry followed.

"Well firstly," he started, "why do you still call me Potter when you've specifically asked me to call you Draco?"

Draco looked at him as they walked. "Are you ashamed of your name, your family?"

"No," said Harry, quite indignant, "of course not."

"Well there you go then. Next question."

Harry took a moment to think about that, then proceeded with his original question. "When we were at my house before, when you realised who Hermione was - I mean, y'know, that she's Muggle born - you attacked her."

"Yes," said Draco evenly.

"Well, now it seems like well - like in the forest back there; you gave her the crucifix, and you talked quite highly of her to Parvati. It just seems a little contradictory."

Draco looked at the hilt of his sword. After a moment he said, "my father." But Harry would have to wait for his answer, as they were interrupted by a blood-curdling scream.

The boys spun on their heals, swords drawn. Seamus and Hermione had done the same. They were met with Parvati being held at the neck by a vampire.

"Crap!" shouted Draco. "How the Hell-?"

"Air's blowing down-wind," said Hermione in a jagged voice. The vampire grinned.

"Malffoy," the creature hissed, baring it's vile pointed teeth and pulled Parvati just and inch or two closer - just enough to make her gasp in fright, tears edging at her eyes.

"Please," she whispered to them, to the vampire. Her chest shook back a sob once more.

Draco lifted his sword and bared his own teeth. "You're out-numbered beast," he spat out, "let her go." The vampire shook his head and grinned even more. He took a step back and Parvati whimpered again. Draco looked them up and down, calculating, planning.

But Harry was watching Hermione.

She was moving ever so slowly, lifting her hand towards Seamus. When the vampire stepped back, she was able to move her hand all the way to his coat pocket in one movement without anyone noticing.

Anyone but Harry that was.

She slipped her hand in the pocket and carefully retracted something; Harry couldn't make it out. "What the Hell do you think you'll accomplish here?" demanded Draco. "If you bite her - I'll kill you quicker than you can blink and there'll still be four of us going down this tunnel." Parvati didn't look too keen on this plan. "Or," offered Draco, "you can back off and no one need ever know you were here - get it?"

But the vampire shook it's head. "Punnissshed," was all it managed,

but it's meaning was pretty clear. This was not going to end nicely. Harry glanced back at Hermione. She had her hands behind her back so Harry had a good view, and seemed to be gently unscrewing something.

Draco raised his sword again but knew it was futile - any blow would hit Parvati. "God damn it!" he cried in frustration. The beast hissed furiously at the mention of The Lord Almighty and tightened his claws around Parvati's already sore and bleeding neck. Seamus took a sharp intake of breath and stepped forward; the vampire seemed unconcerned. Hermione had finished unscrewing and moved the object in her hands; a bottle. Something registered in Harry's memory, but before he could place it precisely, Hermione moved quick as a flash, bringing the bottle out and spraying its contents all over the creature's face.

Instantly it let go of Parvati, who, relatively speaking unscathed, fell into Seamus' arms. The vampire though was clawing at it's steaming, bleeding face; screaming and crying to the darkness. As Harry watched the flesh on it's hands, face and even some of it's torso fizzed and dissolved away. Within a few moments it crumpled to the floor; dust.

"Oh. God," spluttered Hermione, almost gagging. "That's - yuck." She wiped her mouth with her sleeve and looked quite green. Parvati was still shaking in Seamus' arms. They both turned and looked at her. "Thank you," whispered Parvati, her wide eyes revealing her sincerity.

"What the Hell did you do?" asked Seamus, and didn't even flinch as the follow-up rhyme ensued. ("Coz it was ingenious of you.") "Holy Water," said Draco, picking up the bottle Hermione had dropped from her hands. "I never even thought." Seamus' hand flew to his pocket only to find it empty. Hermione managed though shuddery breaths; "I remembered you didn't use it in the forest." She then promptly turned to her left and threw up, leaning onto the wall for support. Harry helped her up. "I'm so sorry you had to get involved in this," he said softly.

Hermione looked back at him, a determined look in her brown eyes. "I didn't have to do anything," she replied resolutely, and stood up by her own accord. Harry smiled at her, gave her shoulders a quick squeeze, then went back to Draco who was still holding the empty

bottle.

He held it up for Harry to see. "Respect," he said simply. "Sorry?" said Harry.

"Your question earlier - about Granger - it comes down to respect."

He dropped the bottle into his damaged bag and closed it once more.

"My father had me memorise her file almost as thoroughly as yours - she's the most powerful witch to be born in a great many years - and I was taught to despise that." He shrugged his shoulders. "But she has the power - the brains, ingenuity, whatever - and when it comes down to it - you have to respect that. Besides," he continued, "it's a lot easier to hate someone when you've never seen their face - heard their voice." He turned his head just so he could see Hermione - also being aided by Seamus now.

Harry could feel his mouth was hanging slightly open; he closed it.

You mean you're not just working on blind prejudice? was what he wanted to ask - but he held his tongue. Instead he settled for the fact that this Draco really was different to the one he knew, and thought it best to embrace it - chances were it was a fragile thing and the selfish, spineless Draco he knew and loathed wouldn't be very far below the surface if pushed to come out.

They walked in silence for a while. They encountered a Quintaped which Harry blasted with the stunning spell he'd learnt last summer and Hermione solved yet another puzzle (involving dice, a jar of frogspawn and a spoon amongst other things), but for the main part they remained quiet. Until.

"Aha!" cried Draco; "Turtufies Lockmentus Catuln!" He waved his wand in a sort of wonky figure of eight and aimed a jet of purple light at Seamus. The spell smacked into him, knocking him back a couple of feet.

"Hey - watch it!" cried the Irish boy. He took a moment to realise that was all he said.

"You're welcome," said Draco silkily, a half grin on his face. The grin didn't last long.

"No - take me instead! Not Harry!" Harry grabbed at his chest and slammed into the tunnel wall.

"Kill the spare."

"Harry!" cried Parvati, "what's wr-"

But at that moment Draco too went deathly white and hit the wall, hands at his temples. "Oh God." he whispered.

"You could have told me - we could have both put our names in the

Goblet. You see Harry - you're just like me - we even look something alike. You'd be great in Slytherin - it's all here. He's been recaptured by the Ministry - there's nothing we can do Harry. Lily, take Harry and go - just GO!"

Harry was physically reeling from the sudden flood of his worst memories. Draco gasped back tears and pulled at his hair; "I'm sorry - so sorry," he whimpered.

"What's happening," cried Hermione, "it's so cold" "Dementors," moaned Seamus, "I don't know how many"

"Too many," said Draco through gritted teeth.

Harry took some deep breaths to steady himself. He'd fought Dementors before, he knew what to do. He pulled out his wand.

"Think of a happy memory," he called out to the rest of the group.

"What!" snapped Draco.

"The happiest you can," called out Harry, "and then say Expecto Patronum." He raised his wand. He could feel them coming, the voices in his head were getting louder; he pushed them away. Draco, confused, pulled out his wand. He squeezed his eyes shut in a physical act of concentration and started muttering "Expecto Patronum, Expecto Patronum," over and over.

"Stay behind me," Harry instructed Hermione; she hadn't even been able to get Sarah's wand out, she was on the verge of tears, as was Seamus. Parvati had managed to get her wand out and was barely whispering the spell between gasps.

Harry turned back round.

There they were. Gliding smoothly, silently towards them, ghostly and horrifying. Harry squeezed his hand around his wand and thought desperately - but no happy thoughts would come. Ron was dead - gone, unless he went home, where Sirius was condemned to death and he would have to leave his family forever. He was going to die in a miserable damp tunnel standing beside the person he had spent the last four years hating for everything vile he represented, for the hours of merciless taunting, for his spiteful schemes and manipulations, for simply being who he was - and he was sure Malfoy felt exactly the same.

But this wasn't Malfoy.

Harry looked at the blond boy beside him, standing resolute between the demons and the other three; willing to die for his cause. He pushed back his tattered bag and started saying the spell louder.

Harry found his thought.

He turned to the Dementors and shouted "EXPECTO PATRONUM!" at the top of his lungs. The familiar and reassuring figure of Prongs exploded from his wand and charged the Dementors. Draco did the same - a great dragon filled the enclosed space of the tunnel and swooped at the creatures. Encouraged, Parvati coaxed a beautiful though faint unicorn from her wand-tip; Seamus and Hermione even managed wisps of smoke of their own, though it didn't matter as the Dementors were already fleeing - seemingly slipping into the wall; dissolving into nothingness along with the ghostly Patronus'.

Almost instantly Harry felt better. He lent on his knees for a moment, then reached into his own bag and found what he was looking for; a couple of chocolate frogs. Breaking them up, he handed them out, saving some for himself. "It'll make you feel better," he assured them when they were reluctant to eat it, and, thinking of Lupin's words on the train two years ago, added, "it's not poisoned, I promise." Seamus nibbled an edge then gave a weak smile. "I do feel better," he admitted. Harry nodded in agreement and lent against the wall. "What on Earth were they?" asked Hermione between shallow breaths.

"Dementors," said Seamus for the second time, "they suck the happiness right out of you - even suck your soul out through your mouth if you get too close." He grimaced and spat on the floor. "Just vile - I've never actually met one before." "That was why it was so hard to come up with a happy though then?" asked Parvati. Harry nodded. "I mean - I was trying - really - but it was like trying hold onto water or something - slipping through my fingers." She thought a moment. "In the end, all I came up with was the kittens mine and Padma's cat just had - Padma's my sister," she added to Hermione, who was still looking ill. "I guess that's kinda pathetic."

Harry shook his head. "It's whatever works, and you did really well." "You did amazing," interrupted Seamus, looking at Harry. "Yeah - what was your happy thought?" asked Parvati. Harry looked at the floor and ran his index finger gently over where his scar should have been. "Hope," he said simply. "Hope?"

"Yeah - it's just that," he turned to face Seamus and Parvati; Hermione watched from where she was leaning against the tunnel wall. "There's this thing I heard once: 'There's no such thing as false

hope - only hope.' I just thought of something that reminded me of that, that's all."

"Oh," said Seamus and looked at Parvati, who gave a small shrug. Harry looked over to where Draco was standing. He wasn't paying them any attention, only looking at his wand thoughtfully, breathing deeply and slowly. "Was that your first Patronus?" asked Harry. Draco nodded. "Y'know - I thought, in fact no - I'm pretty sure my father told me - that once they came after you, that was it - you were dead. I heard these things in my head."

"Yeah, me too," said Harry, cutting him off. He thought that Draco probably had just as many demons as himself and that the others would probably be better off not hearing them. "It was damn impressive though - that dragon."

"What was your memory?" asked Parvati, a little timidly. Draco didn't seem to notice it though. A smile curled around the edge of his lips and his gaze fell somewhere off to the right. "My thirteenth birthday - my mother took me to Venice. We watched this opera and had dinner in a restaurant by the water; it was fantastic. Just me and her, talking about the singing and things - the restaurant was old and vibrant and I could smell the air coming off the canals. And I realised - no one was watching us, no one was scared of us or following our orders. There was no politics or agendas - and I just remember thinking - it was like it was freedom." He smiled at Harry. "No one can take that moment away from me - ever. Not even my father."

He smiled to himself, pushed off the wall and started walking again. Harry and the others followed; he noticed the tunnel seemed to be getting wider.

"How did you know then?"

"Sorry?" Harry turned to look at Seamus.

"How did you know what to do - the counter-spell?" The Irish boy pushed some of his long (and now quite dirty) hair out of his eyes and looked at Harry inquisitively. "You seem really good at all this stuff?"

"Oh - er," said Harry, "well - my dad's friend - Remus Lupin - he's taught me loads of Defence Against the Dark Arts stuff." It was close enough to the truth.

"You are really good," repeated Parvati.

"Uh - well, he's a really good teacher." He turned back round again hoping they would stop questioning; he didn't like lying anymore than he had to. Luckily they did.

It was quiet for a while, and Harry started thinking about what lay ahead. He had so many awful memories, the Dementors had shown him that much, he didn't want to add to them. How was he going to rescue his sister as well as everything else? How would he live through it? The responsibility was starting to get to him, bubbling up through his throat almost. Hermione must have sensed he was troubled; she came and walked by him, taking his arm with a soft smile.

A moment later Draco made them jump with a sharp intake of breath. He grabbed his forearm, just above the wrist and said; "we're getting closer."

"How can you tell," said Hermione concerned, looking round. Draco stopped and faced her. He rolled up his sleeve and showed a throbbing tattoo of a black skull eating a snake. The Dark Mark. It wasn't the only thing Harry saw though; in the dim torch-light he could see several scars - deep slashes across the length of his arm. Draco, sensing Harry's gaze, snatched the material back down again. "It burns when he's close - or mad - or y'know - both." "He?"

"The Dark Lord," he elaborated, not looking at her. "Why do you call him that?" Draco turned to look at Seamus. "The Dark Lord' - why not call him by his real name?" "Why do you call him 'You-Know-Who?'" responded Draco in slightly mocking tones.

"Er," said Seamus, "well, coz I guess we're-"  
"Afraid?" supplied Draco.  
"Uh - yeah."

"Yeah." Draco shook his head in something like disgust.  
"Harry calls him Voldemort," offered Hermione, making everyone else but Harry visibly wince.

"Actually, his real name's Tom Riddle," said Harry, but no one heard.  
"Why'd you say his name?!" demanded Parvati, her mouth open, hands on her hips.

"What?" cried Hermione.  
"It's just tempting fate, alright?" snapped Draco.

It was Seamus' turn to shake his head in disgust. "He's your leader, it's pretty crap you can't even say his name-"  
"I thought I made it clear he's not my leader anymore," cried Draco.  
"God - you think we were any less afraid - coz we were meant to be on the same side? Get real! He's killed just as many of his own

followers as he has enemies - only he makes it last longer for us." Harry saw Draco's eyes were bright, his hands clenching the air. "You still don't get it - do you? It's about respect. I respect he's got more power than - anyone - and, I mean - God, have you even thought about it? You think this is some jolly - you kill a couple of vamps, solve some riddles and that's it?! You do know that when - or should I say if - we get out of this Hell Hole, there's going to be a whole load of new crap waiting for us on the other side?" He paused to take a breath through his teeth. Harry noticed the two girls had edged around the three boys when the fighting had started and he couldn't really see them now. Before he could get a good look though, Draco carried on with his rant. "Have you even thought about it? At all? We could die. And that's not the worst of it." He stepped right up to Seamus, a special kind of hate blazing from his eyes; Seamus didn't look much happier himself. "How old's your sister Finnigan; seven, eight?" Seamus' eyes went wide with shock - so did Harry's. He was almost certain Seamus didn't have a sister, well, not in his world anyway. Seamus set his jaw. "Six," he corrected. Harry got the feeling Seamus wasn't liking where this was going. "Well, you think about her when you're in the crap up there, coz you may die, but he'll track her down and-" "SHUT UP!" yelled Seamus. He'd gone white as a sheet. "You think you can scare me you slimy, pansy-arsed-" "Me?" sneered Draco, half turning away. "Please - my arse is not pansy, and you're one to talk - you're so far in the closet you're finding Christmas presents." Harry had to gasp at that one. "You-!" yelled Seamus and lunged at Draco. Draco went to defend himself, but Harry shoved his arms between them. "Pack it in!" he snapped. Seamus was fuming, Draco gave him a look of disdain. Just as Harry let go of the two of them he heard a - well he could only think it was a splashing noise. "Is it just me," said Parvati, "or have we found a whole lotta-" "Water?" finished Hermione. "What?" cried Draco, spinning round to face them. "Get out!" He ran to the two girls and yanked them out of the water. Harry and Seamus followed and saw that they had indeed got themselves almost knee-deep in a body of water. Harry couldn't blame them though - though torch light seemed to have all but disappeared up a head; he couldn't

see a thing.

"What the Hell were you thinking?" cried Draco, more to himself than anyone else. He then dropped to the ground, and, crouching, flung Hermione's coat open and started running his hands down her legs. "Draco!" squealed Hermione in a high pitched voice and jumped. Her tights had even ripped in a number of places, meaning Draco was perhaps getting even more too close for comfort. He, however, ignored her, and simply spun around and did the same thing to Parvati. She had trousers on though, so was slightly less bothered. Only slightly.

"Get off!" she yelled and aimed a swift kick at his head. He dodged and stood up, oozing agitation.

"Did you not see the big old lake - or feel it even?!" he cried, pointing out in front of them.

Parvati put her hands on her hips and looked daggers at him. "No, actually - my whole body's so numb - I couldn't tell the difference!" Draco ran his hand through his hair, and his tone softened. "It's full of Grindylows - they'll latch onto you and pull you under - they're like overgrown leaches or something."

Harry looked back out over the lake. He indicated to Hermione with a nod; "See the lights bobbing over there." She nodded. "That's them."

"Well - how do we get over it?" asked Parvati, a little agitated herself. She was shivering and hugging herself.

"Simple," said Seamus scathingly, "we can just use Malfoy as a floatation device - he won't notice a thing."

Draco turned and jabbed Seamus in the shoulder. "Why don't we just use your big head - it's filled with enough hot air!"

"Enough!" yelled Parvati, and the two boys stopped to look at her. "I am just sick of this - I am so cold now it's painful - which doesn't really matter since I'm cut and bruised all over from being attacked by vampires - twice! I'm tired, I'm hungry, I'm limping and every which way I turn there's some river beast of giant spider thing trying to kill me - and I can't take you bickering like old ladies anymore!"

She took a slow breath in and everyone stared at her, Harry himself a little afraid. "Now we are going to get through this like adults, right?"

Seamus and Draco looked at one another. "Yeah," said Draco. "Whatever," said Seamus.

"And try and remember this is about Sarah - not you?" She pointed a finger at both of them; Seamus looked guilty.

"Sorry Harry," he said, "it won't happen again." That's what you said

the last time, thought Harry, but he didn't say anything. They were all overly stressed.

"So - how deep is it?" asked Hermione to Draco, easing the tension slightly.

Draco pulled out his wand and said, "Lumos." Holding the wand high he looked out over the water and shook his head. "It goes on for quite a while - it's probably pretty deep."

"Oh," said Hermione and looked at the floor. "It's just - I can't swim - thought you should know."

"We can't swim it anyway - they'd be all over us," replied Draco.

Hermione looked a little less uncomfortable.

"What about using a bubble-head charm," suggested Harry. He was thinking of the second task - he knew they didn't have any Gillyweed, but the charm might work.

But Draco shook his head again. "They'd still pull us under - it's not worth it." He squinted into the gloom. "Could we climb on the walls somehow?" he wondered out loud.

Harry looked doubtfully at the walls. "There's nothing to hold onto is there - unless we had some sort of suction cups - but I don't think that's going to work."

Draco sighed. "No, you're right." Parvati gave another shiver. They seemed to be stuck.

Harry looked at his watch; 4:30. When the Hell had that happened?

"Oh - God!" cried Draco petulantly, "I am not going to be beaten by an over-grown puddle!" He even stamped his foot.

"You knew this was here - didn't you ever think about how to get over it?" demanded Seamus.

Draco narrowed his eyes at him. "I was rather more concerned with not getting caught and subsequently skinned alive thank you very much."

"Can't we fly over it again - like the pit with the spikes in?" asked Hermione. Draco explained it was too far; it wouldn't work. Harry was becoming more and more frozen standing still for so long; he didn't know how Hermione was doing in her skirt. He rubbed his gloved hands together and blew on them. His breath came out like wisps of smoke, curling around his fingers.

"Got it!" cried Seamus suddenly. He went and knelt down by the waters edge. "Transpirta Glacon!" he said pointing his wand into the depths. All of a sudden, from where the spell had hit the water, icy fingers started spreading out in all directions, accompanied by a

rather unsettling cracking noise. In no time, the entire lake was covered in a thick sheet of ice, just like the Great Lake in winter time at Hogwarts when people would go skating. Seamus stood up and gingerly put his foot on the ice. When it held he put his full weight on it and carefully took another step forwards; there was a slight groaning sound, but aside from that it seemed sturdy enough. He turned and grinned at the others. "Not bad, huh?" "Wow," said Hermione and gently stepped into the slippery ice herself. Harry was very impressed, and told Seamus so. Seamus turned to Draco.

"What do you think then Malfoy?" he taunted. Draco clenched his jaw but kept perfect eye-contact with Seamus. "As if it wasn't cold enough in here?" he said scathingly and strode onto the ice, keeping an even balance much to Seamus' disgust. Seamus turned and looked at Parvati, who was still shivering and rubbing her hands together. Upon realising this was probably not the most encouraging sign to be giving to an increasingly agitated Seamus, she stopped, shoved her hands in her pockets and gave an over the top smile, before lowering her eyes and scuttling onto the ice. The five of them made slow but steady progress over the icy lake. Harry kept his wand illuminated, lighting the way. Shadows, little and large were moving underneath them disconcertingly. Harry began to wonder just what else was swimming in the water below. Parvati had half a tune on her lips; parts of lyrics escaped every once in a while echoing in the silence as she looked around nervously. Harry felt she was coaxing herself across, anticipating the next lot of devilment to jump out at them. A fair way across, Harry spotted a hand of a Grindylow sticking out through the ice making rude gestures at them as they passed. Harry pointed this out to Hermione, who acted mildly shocked, and then promptly slipped head over heals with Harry only just catching her in time. "Thanks," she said, a little abashed, and carried on walking carefully.

Harry noticed Seamus pulling distractedly at his earring. He himself found he was holding onto the hilt of Gryffindor's sword every so often, reassuring himself it was still there. They were getting twitchy; it had been too quiet for too long now. "God finally," said Draco after another ten or so minutes of slipping and sliding over the lake. He held his wand higher and the others could see; the edge of the water was only about a Quidditch pitch

away.

Suddenly there was great crack. "What the Hell was that?" snapped Draco.

Seamus looked down at their feet. "Grindylows with pick-axes?" he suggested. Harry snapped his head down, so did the others, and there were indeed several of the little blighters barring their teeth at them through the misty ice waving misshapen pick-axes. Another great crack appeared beneath them; the Grindylows looked to be very pleased with themselves.

"Uh," said Draco, "running would be a good idea?"

They broke into a dead sprint, the ice breaking up underneath their feet. Parvati tripped and skidded, Seamus caught his foot on a jagged point of ice that protruded suddenly in front of him. Draco pinwheeled his arms, trying to keep his balance. There were too many of them.

They weren't going to make it.

The ice beneath Harry's feet seemed to slip out from under him. He shot into the freezing water and was plunged into darkness. He panicked, not knowing even which way was up. Luckily his hands found the solid ice above him - but not the hole he had fallen through. There was movement all around him - ice breaking and water swirling. And then came the hands. Dozens of little clawing fingers pinching and grasping, pulling him in all directions but ultimately down. Harry could feel his glasses slipping from his face, something was pulling his wand from his hand. His chest burned, he needed air, and the water was cripplingly cold.

And then, something bigger, all kinds of things, pawing, clamouring to pull him apart. He tried a disarming spell, but just as in the second task last spring, the words had no effect underwater. Suckers were on his arms, tentacles around his waist, screeching voices in his ears. Harry's vision began to slip away from him, he couldn't focus, think straight. Something grabbed his collar. With a sudden jolt, Harry was yanked up out of the water. Seamus hauled him onto the solid sheet of ice he had managed to perch on, and he shook Harry violently. "Harry!" he yelled, pulling a number of persistent Grindylows off him and flinging them back into the water. Harry's whole world seemed to be swimming still, he couldn't seem to talk, or move. He felt something jam into his chest.

"Pleh!" he gasped as a lungful of water shot out of his mouth. He rolled over and heaved.

"Come on!" cried Seamus, and forced him up. They were running - or

in Harry's case stumbling - on a relatively flat surface; but it wasn't lasting. Around them shards of ice were flying in all directions, huge tentacles flailing, they kept sliding at all angles where the Grindylows and God knew what else were hacking at the ice. Harry could see the shore where the other three were waiting. "Move it!" screamed Parvati; Hermione had her hands pressed against her head and was dancing on tiptoes. Seamus knocked Harry to the ground and they slid cleanly the last couple of meters onto dry land. Seamus rolled onto his back panting. Draco grabbed Harry underneath his shoulders and hoisted him away from the water's edge. "Are you alright?" he barked, and flinging him down, started checking him all over.

"I'm fine," said Harry waving his hands away. He may have been in shock, but the idea of being felt up by Draco Malfoy was still not appealing, even then. "Draco - I said I'm fine!" he cried. Draco backed up, hands up in the air. "Sorry," he apologised, "but you really scared us there." Harry thought he might have concussion. Did Draco just say he was worried about him? Harry rubbed his temples; this just couldn't get any more surreal.

They lit a fire a little further ahead from the lake. Harry could hear numerous creatures moaning and cursing in an unearthly way. Well, when his teeth stopped chattering so hard they were threatening to break his head open that was. "You're going to get hypothermia," worried Hermione out loud as they were taking turns to dry Harry's clothes out. Seamus had a spell to dry Harry out, but they needed root of asphilate to do the same to his clothes (which they didn't have) and then there was the simple fact that they were all now freezing. The upside was that they were all considerably cleaner though. After a while by a roaring fire Harry's clothes were getting dryer, but he was having to fight to stay awake, something not helped by the fact that Hermione was dozing quietly on his shoulder. Seamus was rooting through Harry's bag, looking at the potion ingredients he'd brought with him. He managed to come up with a sort of rudimentary Pepper-Up Potion. It didn't make them smoke at the ears (thankfully) but it did give them a bit of a kick-start. They gathered their bits and pieces together and trampled out the fire. Once they were walking again, Harry felt slightly more awake, and

ever so slightly warmer too. Parvati had unplatted her extremely long hair and given it a good shake in order to dry it, and it now lay damply down her back. Seamus had managed to get himself a nasty graze on his right elbow where the ice had torn the material away, and was nursing it with some cripten leaves Harry's mother had given them, but they weren't really helping. It wasn't long before they came across a kind of shimmering mist blocking their path. Harry felt almost relieved. "This is fine," he told the others, "it's disorienting, but just keep walking with your eyes closed and you'll be fine." Parvati wasn't keen on walking into some sort of trap with her eyes closed, so Harry said he'd go first with her. Holding hands they stepped into the mist and instantly it felt like the world had turned upside down. Parvati gasped and almost fell over her own feet. "Just keep going," Harry told her, squeezing her hand. A few moments after he'd said it, they toppled out the other side. "We're through," he called to the others, but he didn't know if they could hear. Sure enough though, Hermione made her way through shortly after, followed by Seamus. They moved further up the tunnel (now quite narrow again) to allow room for Draco to come through. He did, quite ungracefully, a minute or two later. "Uhg," he uttered upon his arrival and bent over his knees. When he stood up though, he sobered up completely. His eyes flew open in horror and he leapt in one fluid movement past Seamus and Harry. "Look out!" he yelled and managed to grab Hermione, who had wondered up ahead, just in time. Just as he pulled her back a score of spears shot out of the wall on the right, impaling the wall on the left. Hermione hit the floor with a shriek, almost instantly to be swept up by the other three. Just as Parvati was crying, "are you alright?!" Harry realised Draco had not hit the floor with her. Bent over double, leaning against the wall, the spear on the very edge was embedded in Draco's left thigh. "Jesus!" cried Harry and flew over to him. "Don't move Draco." Draco looked up at him, all the colour drained from his already pale face. He shuddered out a nod and tried not to gag. "Is - is that blood?" said Parvati in a weak sort of voice on seeing Draco's leg. and promptly fainted. "Oh good God," snapped Seamus, and leaving Parvati to Hermione, hurried over to Draco. "Just hold still now," he said to the blond boy; Harry was already using his full weight to prop him up. Seamus pulled out is wand and edged around the back of Draco's leg. After a couple

of moments he'd cut through the spear and Draco was able to fall to the ground on his back. Seamus cut the majority of the spear away at the front leaving about a foot sticking out of his leg. Harry was still holding onto Draco who in turn was almost crushing his hands with a death like grip. There was blood everywhere. "This won't hurt a bit Draco," promised Seamus. He then seemed to think a moment. "Actually, has anyone got any Dandelion Tears?" He was met with silence. "Right, well, this might hurt then." Draco rolled his head away and moaned, squeezing his eyes shut. "Okay," said Seamus, "on the count of three." Parvati (who had woken up again) put her fingers in her ears and turned away. Hermione knelt down and took Draco's other hand. "One," said Seamus, "two." He grabbed the spear with two hands and pulled with all his might. Draco shot up in a convulsion of pain, then crumpled back down into a foetal position. When he seemed to start breathing again, a most impressive flow of colourful profanities escaped his mouth.

"Three," finished Seamus.

He moved quickly then. Pointing his wand at Draco's thigh, he used a charm to clean the wound. He then asked Harry for the Gunges Moss he'd seen in his bag earlier, and pushed it against the wound front and back, making Draco grit his teeth and moan again. Seamus picked up his wand once more and said "Jinxess Placebes." Almost instantly Draco relaxed. He opened his eyes and looked around.

"Better?" asked Seamus.

"Much," admitted Draco, but it looked like it cost him. Seamus ripped some of his shirt off underneath his jacket and started to bandage the wound, holding the moss in place. "I bet you enjoyed that, didn't you?"

"Little bit," replied Seamus, half a grin on his face. He knelt back and aimed his wand once more - after a few well chosen words the blood on Draco's leg vanished leaving only some very tattered trouser material behind.

"Er - Draco," said Seamus in a rather bemused voice, looking at the wound he'd just cleaned, "why are you wearing pink underwear?" Draco, who'd been resting his head against the wall, snapped his eyes open and looked down. So did everyone else. "Oh," said Harry, not really knowing what to say.

"Ohh," said Parvati, a little breathless. "Ah," said Draco. Seamus was trying to keep a straight face, but not doing very well at it. "Look - my grandmother," Draco stuttered, "she buys me things - they're expensive - but uh-" "Pink?" Seamus finished for him. "Oh she wanted a granddaughter," snapped Draco. He stood up hastily and, pulling out his own wand, shouted "Reparo!" at the trousers, which mended themselves instantly. Face almost the same colour as his boxers, he barked "shall we?" at the rest of them, turned on his heals and began making his way through the remaining spears still sticking out of the wall.

They walked for a while in silence once more. Draco rubbed his forearm a couple of times and told them they had to be nearly there now - maybe one more obstacle to go. Presently they came to a huge oak door, ornately decorated with snakes apparently eating people. "Nice," said Seamus. Draco frowned. "I guess this is it." He shrugged his shoulders and, taking a good hold of the knob, pushed. It seemed for a moment as if it wasn't going to budge, but then suddenly it gave way, swinging in violently and knocking Draco to the floor. He brushed his clothes down briefly, then looked up at the others. But they weren't looking at him. They had all gone deathly still, and there was a soft growling behind him. Harry took a deep breath. "Hello Fluffy," he said quietly.

They were in a great room, high stone arches and huge blazing torches. Fluffy, the three headed dog Harry knew all to well was standing at the other end, which really, all things considered, was not far enough away.

Parvati screamed, Draco leapt to his feet and Seamus tried to pull the door closed behind them again; but it flew out of his hands, slammed shut, and was conveniently stuck once more, locking them in. Fluffy raised his hackles and growled even louder, taking a couple of steps towards them. There were bones all over the floor and a rotten stench filled the air.

"What do we do!" cried Hermione, petrified. Harry thought desperately - they'd used a flute last time - but they didn't have a flute - or a - or a.

"Violin?" wondered Harry out loud. Something was surfacing in his

memory. "Hermione!" he cried, "can you sing?" "What?!" she shrieked. "Can you sing?" he yelled, "properly, in tune?" "Yes!" she screamed back. "Do it!" cried Harry; Fluffy was getting closer, "sing - anything!" "Er-" she moaned, confused and panicking, "um - er - oh! Uh.'Don't love me for fun girl, let me be the one girl, love me for a reason, let the reason be love.'" As soon as she started, Fluffy stopped in his tracks, his many eyelids drooping. Harry made a motion for her to keep going, so she did. "Don't love me for fun girl, let me be the one girl," Fluffy curled up and started snoring, and they crept round his heads. "Love me for a reason," they eased the door on the other side open, and ("Let the reason be love,") slipped through. "Wow - that was amazing!" cried Parvati once the door was closed again, "I never knew you could sing like that!" Hermione gave a bashful smile, before Seamus cut her off; "I never knew you liked Boyzone," he said in a disgusted voice. Hermione went slightly pink and muttered something about the first thing that came into her head and that really wasn't the point anyway. Harry just felt glad not to have been eaten. He looked around. They were still in the tunnel, except, well, you couldn't really call it that any more. The dank rock had been replaced with shining white marble, the torches were ornate with snakes curling round the brackets. Emerald green plush rugs stretched out along the polished floor and fabulous paintings adorned the walls. Harry felt a sharp pain in his forehead; just where his scar should have been. He gasped and his hand flew to the source of the pain. That wasn't a good sign. Draco turned round to face them, his face set. Nodding slightly, he said slowly, "this is it," and turning back, strode towards the black door a few meters ahead. He placed his hand on the silver knob and waited for the others to catch up. Harry was going to say something, warn them what his scar hurting meant, when Draco turned his head, and swallowed. "Whatever happens in here," he said through dry lips, "you've got to trust me." "What?" asked Harry, but he received no answer. Draco turned the handle and the door swung open easily. He walked swiftly through flanked by the others. Harry was momentarily blinded by the bright light shining into his eyes; he flung his hand up to see just as the others did. Almost as soon as they had done this though,

the light softened to normal, and Harry lowered his arm. They were in a semicircular auditorium, with stone steps extending high up from where they were standing; the middle of the half-moon stone stage. The door slammed behind them, but Harry barely noticed. He was looking out at the scene that lay before him. There were people in hooded black robes standing on every step, looking down at them, arms folded. Directly in front of them stood Lord Voldemort. He smiled. Positioned either side of him were Bartemius Crouch, Lucius Malfoy, Peter Pettigrew, and the woman with the hooded eyelids and black hair that Harry had seen in Dumbledore's Pensieve. Harry couldn't seem to breath properly, he must be in a nightmare. But he felt the pain in his forehead and knew it was real. He tried to find his voice, he had to ask Draco what was happening. But before he could, Lucius Malfoy opened his arms and smiled his cruel smile. "Draco," he said warmly, "how nice it is to see you." Draco smiled back and bowed slightly. "Hello father," he replied pleasantly.

"You backstabbing son of a-"  
"Draco!" hissed Harry through a clenched jaw, cutting across Seamus, "what the Hell is going on?"  
Draco though, didn't look or acknowledge them in any way; he just inclined his head slightly and looked at his father. Harry felt a knot of panic squeezing his insides. How could he have been so stupid?! He'd walked straight into a trap, he'd let his compassion go against his every instinct that this boy was nothing but a spineless, self-centred traitor. All his crocodile tears in the forest, all that stuff about his mother, it was bullshit and Harry should have God damn known it. And now what had happened? He'd led three innocent people to their deaths. Again.  
"You're new found friends seem a little upset Draco," said Lucius Malfoy to his son, cold amusement lacing his words. Crouch grinned to his left, Wormtail's eyes seemed to be wide still with relief.  
"Yes - well, betrayal tends to do that to people," replied Draco calmly, holding his father's eye-contact unflinchingly. Lucius laughed softly to himself, and readjusted his grip on the cane he was holding in front of him. The silver knob was covered in entwined serpents, Harry noticed in a detached sort of way as he scanned the vast room for any and all points of exit. There didn't seem to be any.  
"Naturally," began Lucius silkily, gesturing with his hand for emphasis, "when we discovered your absence, we assumed you were attempting to retrieve what the Dark Lord required - to make up for that little fuss you made prior to your departure; a task no doubt made easier by the actions of our friend Wormtail here." Harry saw Wormtail wince ever so slightly; Lucius smiled.  
"Quite," said Draco simply.  
Parvati went to move, to wrap her hands around Draco's skinny neck perhaps, but Harry grabbed her arm and stopped her before anyone else really noticed. He wasn't too sure why, but he was getting the feeling that something wasn't quite right here, and nothing could be gained by attacking Draco now anyway.  
"So - now we have what we - or should I say, our Lord needs - all you need do is step aside, and take your place by my side."  
"Of course," was all Draco said. But he didn't move.  
This is a game, thought Harry, his breath still rapid, his fingers still

holding tightly onto the hilt of Gryffindor's sword. But what? "Step aside son," said Lucius, all traces of amusement gone from his voice and face.

"You know father" said Draco, tilting his head in thought, "when a child is young, he's rather like a small glass; easy to fill." His voice, unlike his father's, was alive with amusement, so much so Harry wondered if it was bordering on barely controlled rage. "But when that child grows up, so does the glass, and the same amount of water just won't do anymore." Lucius was not looking pleased.

"Draco," he growled, threateningly.

"You never learn - do you father?" cried Draco, an made to say something else, but Voldemort interrupted him.

"Your son is spirited, isn't he?" he addressed Lucius.

Lucius however continued staring at his son, as if such an act alone would strike him dead. "If this is about Narcissa-" he hissed.

"This has everything to my mother," Draco replied, not that far off the rage Harry had sensed only a moment ago. "What is it you say father? 'Malfoys never forget, and they certainly never-'"

"Forgive?" finished Voldemort for him. Draco's head snapped to look at him; he smiled, blood red eyes blazing. "An interesting concept is it not? Surely, if someone has failed you, betrayed you perhaps, how is it possible to forgive them - ever trust them again, or more to the point, let them live to try it another day?" He gracefully placed his fingers together in an imitation of thought. "For example," he continued in barely more than a whisper, "if one my followers had taken it upon themselves to ally themselves against me, even attempt to bring my enemy into my lair and have him defeat me when I was weak, well - surely such an act as this should not be forgiven?"

Draco stood resolutely, considering what was being said. Harry held his breath - maybe Draco hadn't betrayed them after all?

"You see young Mr Malfoy," said Voldemort, his tone though dangerously quiet still resounding round the arena, "I have seen a great deal of your activities of late. Do you believe it was by accident you made it out of the country unnoticed, through the forest unscathed? I wanted to see if your intentions really were devious, and waited here with my servants to prove with your father that you were loyal to me still." He paused to let his words take effect. The woman with the black hair smirked knowingly on his right; Lucius looked furious.

"All you have to do Mr Malfoy, is hand over young Mr Potter, and all

will be - forgiven."

Draco didn't respond to this immediately. Instead he reached over his shoulder and unsheathed his sword; holding it in front of him it glinted in the shadowy torchlight. "Maybe I don't want to be forgiven by you?" he said, looking at the sword, voice once again calm. "Maybe there are more important people I want to be forgiven by - like say, oh the ones standing behind me?"

The knot in Harry's stomach seemed to release itself slightly, but not by much. Draco may not have betrayed them, but they had still been caught out and were now surrounded by hundreds of Death Eaters, if not more.

Voldemort allowed himself an incredulous smile, or as much of one as he could manage on his hideous snake-like face. "I see," he said slowly, "I am curious though - just what do you hope to accomplish by this Mr Malfoy?"

Draco smiled back. "My name," he said even more slowly, "is Draco. And I hope to accomplish trivial things, like truth, justice." His smile twisted slightly. "Revenge."

Voldemort shook his head. "Your rather Gryffindor-like bravery," he spat out, "does not seem to match your mathematical skills, Mr Malfoy, for there are well over a thousand of us - and only five of you."

"Five?" was all Draco said.

A movement to the far left of Harry's vision caught his eye. About two thirds of the way up the stands of the arena, one of the countless Death Eaters lowered their hood and stood for a moment, considering. It took Harry a few seconds to realise he knew this girl; she was in his own year at school even. Her name was Blaise Zabini, a quiet Slytherin girl who normally hid behind a sheet of shining brown hair whilst Pansy Parkinson and her gang tormented other students. Harry had barely heard her speak more than two words the entire time he'd been at Hogwarts, but he knew she was very clever. Perhaps the fact that her hair was now cut extremely short, or the fact that she stood confidently, shoulders back, expression firm and decisive, was why Harry had failed to recognise her straight away; yet another change in this world compared to his own. Blaise seemed to come to a decision, and took a step down towards the stage. "Blaise," came a hissed voice, and a middle aged woman who had been standing next to her lowered her hood as well. "What are you doing?!"

"I'm doing what's right mother," she replied sadly, "I wouldn't expect

you to understand."

She dropped her black robes to the floor, revealing tightly fitted jeans and a purple jumper, and walked down the steps under the silent gaze of everyone else in the hall, taking her place next to Draco. He gave her the smallest of smiles, then flicked his eyes back to Voldemort and his father. "Six," he said defiantly. Voldemort laughed, he was joined by a number of others, but Lucius just looked furious still. "How impressive," he snarled. "I'm not finished yet," replied his son. All of a sudden it seemed, there were at least a dozen more robes dropped to the floor, their owners walking swiftly towards Harry and the others. Voldemort amusement lessened somewhat. "I see," he said evenly. But then, to Harry's right, another group of Deatheaters threw down their robes, deserting their lord, and even more on the far left. More to the back, some very near the front, more and more were declaring their allegiance to Draco's cause, most of them young, but many older members too. Harry looked on in awe; was this really happening, was he witnessing the mutiny of Voldemort's follows, right before his eyes? And yet more came, walking decisively down onto the stage, until it seemed the group had been split quite evenly in two. Harry stared at those around him; some he knew, most he didn't. They all had a more or less identical look of resolution on their faces; they were all fixing their gaze on Voldemort. Voldemort looked enraged beyond anything Harry had witnessed before. The four standing beside him, his most loyal servants, looked more than a little worried, as did the Deatheaters closest to them, who's faces Harry could just make out. "Devious snakes," he said, voice shaking with anger, "traitorous vermin - how dare you trifle with my patience so, you-" "Did you not see this coming though, oh Dark Lord?" said a voice very familiar to Harry, "I was under the impression there was nothing that escaped your knowledge." Harry looked for the source of the disturbance; he was met by the sight of Severus Snape walking calmly down the stairs towards them also dropping his black robes to the floor.

His mind flashed back to Dumbledore's words last summer; Snape's actions were at 'a great personal risk to himself.' He must be a spy, Harry realised, both in this world and his own. He reached the stage, and unlike the others, stood in front of Draco. "Let me introduce you to Freiheit," he said, loud enough for everyone

to hear, but clearly addressing his former master standing before him. "There are perhaps more of us than even I realised - but then, you have wounded so many, it was impossible the grievances would not mount." He continued with his speech, stating their defection and intentions, and people around started fidgeting, breathing became rapid, the temperature seemed to drop several degrees; a battle was seconds away from erupting between the two sides, and Harry knew it.

He reached for his wand, but Draco stopped him. "Magic won't work in here for anyone but him," he whispered urgently. "What do you expect us to do then?!" cried Parvati desperately. "Use the stakes," said Draco to the two girls. "But they're not vampires," moaned Hermione. "I think a stake through the heart might just kill them anyway," cried Draco, and just in time to. Snape had come to the climax of his speech, or at any rate, Voldemort had become tired of it. He plunged his waxy arm into his robes and the killing spell spun out in an arch instantaneously.

Snape was only just able to dive out of the way of the green light, but another young man was unfortunately caught in its path behind him. He crumpled to the floor, dead, before he even knew what had hit him.

Just like Cedric.

There was a demented roar in the air as the two sides ran at each other. Madness, chaos, confusion, Harry didn't know which way to turn. Gryffindor's sword was out as soon as he had room to do so, and more by chance than design, he slashed and hit one of the robed figures, sending him crashing to the floor. Harry felt shocked and sick. He'd killed someone. He'd taken a life of a human being; he couldn't even see their face, didn't even know their name. Maybe that was a good thing, he thought numbly. He didn't have much time to think though. Someone slammed into him, bringing him back to reality. People were running everywhere, screaming and shouting filled the air, blood splattered the stone floor.

Voldemort had disappeared.

Trying not to gag, Harry ran forward, not too sure of where he was going. On seeing Wormtail running away up the steps however, he remembered suddenly why he was there, what his mission was. He charged up the stone steps, following him into a dimly lit stone corridor that echoed with the sound of footsteps, but which was completely devoid of people. Harry stalked forward, eyes and ears

open. Even so, he only just heard the person coming up behind him. On reflexes trained by so many years of Quidditch, he spun round, sword in hand, and caught the person straight through the torso. Their eyes met; it was the woman from Dumbledore's pensive. Dagger still in hand, she choked, blood spluttering from her mouth, and crumpled to the floor. "You'll - never - win," she gasped. Her eyes fluttered closed, the dagger dropped to the floor. Harry backed away, the sounds from the battle still ringing in his ears. He turned and continued his search for Wormtail, and hopefully, his sister. His knuckles were deathly white on the hilt of his sword, he wiped his forehead with his sleeve and licked his dry lips. The shadowy corridor turned a corner; Harry took a deep breath and jumped round it, sword raised. Nothing. He hurried along, the noises from the auditorium fading slightly, and began to wonder if Wormtail had even gone this way at all. All doubt was erased, however, at the sound of a young girl screaming, not far from where Harry was walking. "Help!" she screamed, echoing in all directions, "please, somebody help me! I'm here, they've tied me up, I can't-" and then she was silent.

Sarah.

Harry broke into a full sprint, hurtling around corners and up and down short flights of stairs. He reached a door, it was open ajar, and there was definitely somebody moving inside. Not even pausing to think, Harry threw his whole weight onto the heavy oak door, crashing it open to the sound of rusty hinges. He was in a round room, not that big, the walls and floor made of the same grey stone as before. In the centre stood an ancient looking wooden table, round again, with snakes carved into the legs, the Dark Mark emblazoned on the top. Sarah was sitting on the floor on the far side of the room, her back resting against the wall, her hands and feet tied. She was dirty, her face tear-stained, her hair at all angles, and her lip was swelling with a bruise and bleeding, presumably having just been hit in an effort to stop her screaming. She was whimpering and crying behind Wormtail, who was crouched in front of her, when Harry entered. As the door slammed into the wall, he spun round, fear in his eyes. "Harry!" cried Sarah, "watch out! He's right behind you!"

Harry didn't even have a moment to comprehend what she was saying, before he was flung into the side of the room in a flash of blue

light. "Harry Potter," said a voice as cold as ice, "how nice to finally make your acquaintance." The old oak door slammed shut. Harry struggled to his feet, blood trickling down his face from a gash somewhere near his temple. Sarah moaned and whimpered in the corner; Wormtail cowered beside her, terrified of his master's wrath. "I have been hoping for your presence for some time now - I did not realise it would be this soon though, a most happy accident, would you not agree?" Voldemort grinned, Harry bared his teeth and raised his blade.

"You are no doubt aware of my depleting health," he continued clinically, "and for a number of years my seers have been searching in vain for a cure. It seemed hopeless - until recently, when it appeared that the one person in this world who, according to prophecy, holds the power to defeat me, also was the means to my recovery."

He began walking round the table, and for the first time Harry realised there was another object in the room; the Mirror of Eris. His reflection was just out of sight, but an inkling as to what might be going on was forming in Harry's mind. "It seems there has been some sort of change in you, Harry Potter, and you have been singled out as the one, the only one, who knows how to retrieve the Philosopher's Stone from this most ingenious mirror and thus restore my immortality. Do have any idea of what I speak?" This last line was delivered almost playfully. Harry stood tall. "I won't help you, if that's what you're asking," he shot back, more confidently than he really was, "I've come for my sister and that's it."

Voldemort laughed. "You do know what I am talking of, excellent, now, kindly save us all a great deal of trouble and stand in front of the mirror. Once you have what I want, I shall kill you and your sister painlessly." He grinned once more, and linked his fingers together. "Relatively speaking at any rate," he added. Harry took a deep breath. "I won't help you," he repeated. Voldemort's expression became suddenly severe. "Imperio!" he yelled, pointing his wand at Harry. Suddenly, Harry's mind was blissfully black, completely wiped of all his many worries and concerns. Walk towards the mirror, said a voice at the back of his head, and tell me what you see. Okay, thought Harry, and went to move his foot. But then he heard something else; don't do it Harry, don't do it, fight it. Harry paused to

consider, was that his own voice? It came again, and was followed by a third voice; I don't think I want to do this. Walk to the mirror. No.

Do what I say.  
I don't want to.  
Don't do it Harry - you can fight it.  
"Do it now!"  
"No!"

Harry, stumbled over his feet, just as he had done in Defence Against the Dark Arts last year, breaking out of the curse. He swung his sword out forcing Voldemort back. "There's quite a few things different about me, actually," he cried, and lunged again, determinedly not looking in the mirror; he didn't want to retrieve the Philosopher's Stone until absolutely necessary. Voldemort was not to be deterred though. "I will have obedience," he roared, "Crucio!"

Harry felt like he was on fire, his knees buckled and he fell to the ground on all fours. "I am not so weak after all Harry Potter, would you not agree?" But even as he said it, he breathing became laborious, and the spell faltered. Voldemort grimaced, but held fast. "You have broken though my defences, initiated chaos amongst my followers, defied me - my wishes but you will do as I say!" The effort seemed to take too much from him though, and the spell weakened even more. With a burst of renewed energy, Harry heaved himself off the floor, still hurting but less so from the curse, and ran at the debilitated Voldemort, smacking him to the ground. He yelled furious, and tried to push Harry off him. But Harry knew what to do. Taking a deep breath and closing his eyes, he grabbed onto Voldemort's face.

Pain exploded in his forehead, threatening to split his whole head open. Voldemort screamed, so did Harry, so did Sarah, but it was working; Voldemort was weakening considerably. Tears streamed down Harry's face. Just a bit longer, he willed himself. He didn't have to last any longer though. Wormtail grabbed him by the shoulders and hauled him off; Harry jerked his head, arched his back in response. Still reeling with pain, Harry grabbed Wormtail and rolled him onto the floor with him; they both hit the wall with a crack and crumpled.

Harry staggered to his feet again, and realised the previous crack had been something breaking in his arm. He gasped as pain seared through his left arm; Voldemort tried also to rise to his feet, but failed. He still managed to grin at Harry though, teeth now the same colour as his eyes from the blood he was coughing up. A look of triumph was on his face. "Seize him!" he hissed, but nobody else other than Harry understood him.

The snakes around the table legs began uncoiling themselves and slithered rapidly towards Harry. "Bring him to me!" yelled Voldemort. But Harry had other ideas. He stumbled backwards, clutching his arm, and yelled, "stop!" speaking in Parseltongue, just like Voldemort had done. The wooden serpents halted immediately in their tracks. Wormtail made to get up, do what the serpents had failed to do perhaps. But Sarah, unnoticed, had shifted herself over to where he and her brother had landed, and chose now to aim a well timed kick at his knees.

"Ah!" he grunted as he toppled over his own feet, crashing to the ground.

"Bind him," commanded Harry angrily, pointing at Wormtail with his good arm. The snakes did as they were told. Voldemort's expression was one of incredulous fury; he stood up with difficulty. "What is the meaning of this?!" he demanded, speaking English once more.

"I told you I'd changed," spat Harry, dropping the sword with a resounding clang and pulling out his wand. Sarah pushed herself away again, sensing something bad was about to happen. "Now lets see how much you've changed," he cried, and, not really knowing what he was doing, not giving himself time to really think of the consequences, Harry uttered the most feared and awful curse known in magic; "Avada Kedavra!"

Just as he'd hoped, not only was Voldemort sufficiently weakened for his sole control of magic to be broken, but he also had the presence of mind to retaliate. "Imperio!" he yelled once again at Harry. Just as last summer, the two wands, containing feathers from the same phoenix tail, joined in a blaze of magnificent gold light, locking the hands of both owners firmly in the connection. Voldemort gasped, red eyes wide in trepidation. Wormtail tried unsuccessfully to shift away from them both, but his bonds held him firmly in place. Sarah gave a startled cry as the light splintered and formed a golden cage around the two wizards, the comforting phoenix song filling the air.

Harry's hand, if anything, shook even more than last summer in the graveyard, meaning he had to use his broken arm to steady himself.

The pain was horrendous.

"What is this?" shrieked Voldemort.

Although Harry's concentration was firmly fixed on his vibrating wand, he still found it within himself to answer. "Priori Incantatem," he said through gritted teeth, "our wands - didn't you know - the cores are from - the- same Phoenix." It was taking too much effort to maintain a stable connection as well as talking; Harry reasoned he was better off to stop talking.

The beads along the thread of light began sliding up and down from one end to another, as Harry hoped they would. Focusing his every available thought on these beads, they began, ever so slowly, edging towards Voldemort's wand. He didn't know what it would accomplish; the spells were different from last time, but Harry could only hope, that was all.

The beads were gaining speed. Voldemort's wand shuddered violently, making him cringe and moan. "You will not defeat me boy!" he yelled, more than a hint of panic in his words. Harry watched, watched not breathing, not blinking as the beads slid closer and closer to the tip of Voldemort's wand. "I already have," he breathed weakly.

There was an tumultuous explosion as the beads connected. The green light threw Harry clean off his feet, sending him sailing for a third time into the cold stone wall. Sarah screamed and rolled under the table, Wormtail whimpered and squeezed his eyes shut as Harry landed painfully beside him.

An unearthly scream filled the air. The golden cage shattered, raining fragments down on the small room and ending the phoenix's song. Still the screaming went on, the green light was shinning blindingly from an unknown source, making it impossible for Harry to see anything at all. He forced himself to sit up against the wall, hand gripping his burning wand, and squinted at where Voldemort had landed after too being thrown against the wall. The shadowy outline of a figure; hands pressed to his ears, trying to make the noise stop. Harry didn't know what to do - there was no escape - he had to get him and Sarah out of there before - before. But he was too late.

The Dark Lord raised his wand with a shaking hand, pointed it at Harry, a demented laugh on his lips. "You will not defeat me!" he

screamed, "Avada Kedavra!" Harry didn't even have time to think. He flung his arms in front of his face, his strangled cry mixing with Sarah's scream. The spell, the one that had killed his parents, hit him like a tidal wave, choking him, crushing him. He burned, he folded in despair, he was awash with death.

But he did not die. Instead, a blinding pain sliced into his forehead, and the one screaming changed from himself, to Voldemort. A booming noise resounded through the room, the walls shook, surely to come down upon him. He crawled, as if through treacle, the curse still having a grasp on him, under the table with Sarah. There was a deafening, thundering noise as huge chunks of the walls, the ceiling came crashing down around them. And then everything was black and silent.

Am I dead? thought Harry numbly. "Harry?" came a small voice beside him, bringing him to his senses. Sarah repeated his name, and this time he found strength enough to respond. Sitting up as quickly as he could (careful not to bash his head on the table) he lit his wand. The room was in ruins; debris everywhere. Voldemort was nowhere to be seen. Harry put his wand between his teeth and set about clumsily untying Sarah. As he finished with her hands and moved on to her feet, she reached forward and touched his face. "You're bleeding Harry," she said, tears in her eyes. He nodded his head, and when he'd finished untying her feet, took the wand from mouth and assured her he knew - he'd got the gash on his temple some time ago. But she shook her head; "no," she told him, "you just got it - it's on your forehead - it looks like-"  
"A lightening bolt?" he finished for her, disbelieving. She nodded. Good God, he thought, it happened again. He took her hand, and they crawled out from under the table. She helped him stand, his arm unbearably painful now. Harry scanned what remained of the room; Voldemort was definitely gone; just as before, when he was a baby. He looked at his arm, his skin; soaked in his mother's sacrifice still it seemed. He handed his wand to Sarah and told her to keep it for the time being. Picking up the sword, he spoke to the wooden snakes again, telling them to follow him with Wormtail. The sight of Pettigrew being

slithered along might have been amusing if it wasn't so disturbing and Harry wasn't so tired.

As they drew nearer to the auditorium, the sounds of the battle still raging told Harry of what they were likely to meet, and he spoke quietly and urgently to Sarah. "There might be some awful things in here," he said, a sickening feeling rising in his stomach, "so if I tell you to close your eyes and hold onto me, you've got to do it - okay?" Sarah agreed, biting her lip and looking scared. They entered the hall. There was no other word to describe it other than utter horror.

There were people still running in all directions, bodies all over the floor, screams and yells of rage filling the air. Harry was just about to cry for Sarah to shut her eyes, when a young male Deatheater, not much older than Harry himself, charged at them, a short blade raised in front of him. Harry went to swipe with his own blade, but Sarah, still clutching his want, shouted "Expelliarmus!" her hands shaking, but her aim was dead on.

The boy went sailing backwards in a flash of red light, making those around them stop and stare. "We can use magic!" cried a de-robed woman a dozen or so steps down from them. Instantly the nature of the fighting changed as the message spread; Freiheit began shooting out stunning spells of bright blue, the Deatheaters' spells though were largely green.

As Harry, tried to move his sister around the fray though, towards what he hoped was the main entrance (leaving Wormtail bound where he was) he saw many chose to carry on the fight with their hand-held weapons. Even as his gaze swept across the scene before him, he saw an older Deatheater drive his blade into the gut of a young boy, before being blasted from afar by a jet of blue light. It seemed as if time suddenly came to a grinding halt. As Sarah grasped onto him, Harry frowned and tilted his head, staring at the boy as he looked down, stunned at his wound. Many people ran past; another three or four Deatheaters were hit by the stunning spell as Freiheit began turning the tide of the battle, stacking up Voldemort's frozen followers. There were one or two more flashes of green as well. People yelling, explosions everywhere, the clanging of metal, the clashing of curses and spells. But still Harry watched the boy, unaware his breathing had stopped. Only a matter of seconds had passed, but it seemed like an eternity as the boy sank slowly to his knees and looked up; directly at Harry.

Harry knew who it was though, before the blade had even hit home he'd known who the boy now drenched in his own blood was. It was Seamus.

"Seamus!" screamed Harry, running full pelt towards him, Sarah matching his pace. A member of Freiheit darted across them, unaware of blocking their path, but Harry and his sister just jumped round them, barely noticing themselves. Seamus took a shaky gasp of air, then keeled over on his side. Harry reached him and scooped him up with his good arm. "Seamus!" he cried, "Seamus, we're here, we'll get help!" The young Irish boy looked up at him, his breathing strained, his eyes struggling to stay open.

"I'm - so - sorry Harry," he managed, as the two Potters heaved him up towards the entrance they had been heading for previously. They ducked as a spell of an unknown nature went flying past, but otherwise they made it to the heavy double doors unscathed. Harry was just preparing to slam his broken left arm into the door in an effort to open it without dropping Seamus, when Draco came flying towards them.

"Harry!" he called and skidded to a halt. "Open the door," instructed Harry through gritted teeth before Draco could say anymore; he needed to get Seamus and Sarah to safety. He did so, and the three of them spilled into a marbled entrance hallway. They hurried through, up a flight of grand looking stairs, and Draco slammed into a second set of doors, bringing them out into the night. They kept running until Harry could go no further, and then collapsed onto the forest floor, devoid of snow due to the expansive canopy.

Harry laid Seamus down as Draco looked on stunned, Sarah gasped as tears started spilling down her face. Harry looked at Draco. "Voldemort - I - he's gone," he tried to explain to him, unable to find the proper words. "But I -" he continued desperately, not even too sure of what he was saying, "I - I need help; Seamus he - he needs help." His voice, cracking, trailed away to nothing but a whisper. "Help," he cried softly looking at Seamus, holding onto his shoulder with his good hand.

"I'll get help Harry," cried Draco, "just keep talking to him - I'm getting help right now." He sprinted off into the darkness, back to the battle. Seamus managed a weak smile, and reached out with his left hand.

"Sarah," he croaked through numb lips, and coughed involuntarily, hacking up more blood. Sarah let out a sob and knelt down beside him. "You're safe," he said softly, then grimaced in pain. Sarah stroked his hair.

"You're going to be fine," she assured him, tears still tracing their way down her dirty cheeks. The thudding of feet on the frozen ground made Harry's head snap up. He was expecting to see Draco returning, but was instead met with the sight of Parvati and Hermione running towards them. They were both covered in cuts and blood, and Hermione was developing a nasty black eye, but other than that they seemed more or less okay. Hermione stopped just before them and gasped, but Parvati dropped immediately to the ground beside Seamus and grabbed his hand.

"Seamus?" she cried, her voice breaking with emotion. Hermione came and crouched silently beside Harry. "Draco told us," she said quietly, "we're winning - in there. he's gone to get help."

"Harry," called Seamus, unable even to lift his arm now. Harry grasped his shoulder and squeezed it reassuringly. "Harry - I'm so sorry," he said again.

Harry's voice caught in his throat. "There's nothing - nothing to be sorry for Seamus," he told him sternly. Parvati nodded earnestly, tears shining on her long eyelashes. "You were so brave," she said, "I was so proud of you."

Seamus smiled. "You too," he said weakly. Parvati tried to smile back, but she couldn't quite manage it. Sarah bit her trembling lip and held on tightly to Harry's good arm.

What was taking so long! Harry thought desperately; but almost instantly reasoned that there were hundreds of people still in the auditorium just as bad, if not worse than Seamus - they all needed help. But I want to save my friend, thought Harry pitifully.

At last, Draco came hurtling back into the blackness of the forest, with Snape close at his heals. Draco lit his wand and held it high as Snape dropped to his knees beside Parvati in order to inspect the wound. Seamus muttered something about them being needed in side, Draco brushed him off saying they'd almost won anyway. Snape peeled back Seamus' bloodstained coat and shirts. He looked gravely at the deep wound, then looked at Draco. He shook his head.

"W-What do you mean?" cried Parvati, "we have to do something."

"We cannot do anything," said Snape quietly, an unknown tone in his voice. Harry could only place it as remorse. Snape stood, nodded once to Draco, then went hurriedly back the way he had come. Parvati was distraught. "Where's he going," she cried to Draco, "we have to help Seamus—" But Draco silenced her. He crouched down and took her hand. "It's an enchanted blade - V-Voldemort issued them himself - there's no cure."

Parvati shook her head defiantly, and turned back to Seamus, ignoring the others. "You're going to be fine," she told him, trying to keep her voice strong. Seamus went to smile, and coughed up more blood. His breathing was worse, but he tried with one weak hand to reach into the top of his shirt. Harry didn't know what he was doing, but Parvati knew instantly. She reached in for him and drew out a golden Celtic Cross on a fine glimmering chain. Seamus smiled weakly, and with what was left of his strength, began to pray. "Hail, Mary, M-Mother of God, venerable treasure of the whole universe." Parvati subdued a dry sob, and joined in with him. "Hail, Mother of God. You - you enclosed under your heart the infinite God whom no space can contain. Hail, Mary, Mother of God. Hail, Mary, Mother of God." His voice was slipping away from him. Harry held his hand tightly. "Hold on Seamus - hold on." A last breath escaped his lips; and as his hand fell from Harry's grasp onto the cold and muddy floor, dawn broke over the Black forest of Germany, and the rain began to poor.

Hold on Hold on Don't be scared You'll never change what's been and gone May your smile Shine on Don't be scared Your destiny may keep you warm Coz all of the stars Have faded away Just try not to worry You'll see them some day Take what you need And be on your way And stop crying your heart out  
Oasis

"S-Seamus?" Parvati croaked, hands shaking, lip trembling.  
"Seamus?"

Harry reached numbly over to her with his good hand, covered in grime and blood. "Parvati," he whispered, trying to offer some pitiful comfort. Her face broke, and she crumpled onto Seamus' lifeless body sobbing.

"No," she cried, inconsolable, "no, Seamus - Seamus wake up, c-come back!" Her knuckles were white where she was grasping the material of his torn shirt so tightly, her shoulders rippled with grief and despair.

Hermione slowly brought her hands up to cover her mouth, a sob shuddering through her chest. She stepped back involuntarily, not taking her eyes off Seamus, stumbling into Draco, who automatically put his arms around her shoulders and held her, his eyes glassy and fixed on a boy he supposedly loathed. Sarah's cries startled the night just as suddenly as Parvati's. With a gasp she dissolved into unrelenting tears and buried her face into her brother's side, holding onto him so tightly she was in danger of breaking him in half.

Harry, of all of them, moved the least. His hand rested lightly on Parvati's shaking figure a moment, before moving silently back over Seamus' body. He gently leant over, and closed his vacant eyes. Harry had seen death before; he knew the endless feelings of remorse and guilt and despair that were welling up inside him, swallowing him whole. He knew it was his fault, he knew Seamus, like Cedric, had died because of him, and he knew it should have been him in his place. A bitter blackness enveloped him, deadening the cries of the girls, filtering out Draco's presence beside him, snuffing the light from his wand. He felt nothing, and everything. The rain pelted into the trees, running in rivets down the trunks,

sliding along the ground, mixing with the dirt under Harry's knees, plastering his hair to his bloody forehead. They remained frozen like that for an eternity it seemed. Harry could see nothing but Seamus' peaceful face, hear nothing but the rain; until the pounding of footsteps brought him back into the real world. Two figures were approaching, silhouetted by the light from Voldemort's lair. Harry, felt a sharp intake of breath fill his chest; he fumbled to the right for Gryffindor's sword, guessing some of those still loyal to the Dark Mark were coming to finish the job and kill them all.

They would have to get through Harry first. He stood on wobbling legs and called for Sarah to get behind him, along with the others. "We're friends!" called out a voice from up ahead, and two men in Ministry uniforms came into the weak wand light. "We're aurors; we're with Alistair Moody - we've come to help you."

Harry sat on the stone steps and looked in a detached sort of way at his hands. They were splattered with drying blood. He could trace the threads that were his own; older and darker, and those which belonged to Sarah, Draco, Seamus. His fingernails were black with grime from the tunnel, dust from Voldemort's chamber, mud from the forest. His left hand was swollen, his right developing a nasty bluish bruise just under the thumb joint. They were shaking slightly, and his right hand kept groping unknowingly for the hilt of Gryffindor's sword lying beside him.

He blinked his eyes, suddenly very tired. He tried to concentrate on the words flying about his ears, but his eyelids kept dropping. The blood from his new lightening bolt scar had been smeared across his forehead and was now drying uncomfortably in his hair and eyebrows. There was a taste of sick in his mouth, a thumping in his head. Somebody placed a firm hand on his knee, stirring them back to his attention. "Harry," said Mad Eyed Moody, "I know you've had a tough night, but you need to tell us the rest - what happened next?" He looked a lot like Harry remembered him, although obviously he had known an impostor for the most part of last year. But even so, a great deal of Crouch's Polyjuiced version could still be seen here; same growling voice, same revolving blue eye, same suspicious nature. He was slightly different as well though; the huge chunk normally gone from his nose was intact here, having never captured those Harry had

seen in Dumbledore's pensive, and his wooden leg was of a more ornate design. He was kneeling in front of Harry, another official by his side noting down everything Harry said. Harry sighed and looked around him. They were back in the auditorium; it was packed with hundreds of Ministry witches and wizards, summoned by Snape, organising the aftermath of the chaos that had been rampant there not half an hour ago. Bodies, both of Voldemort's followers and those of Freiheit, were being covered with white sheets; medical teams ran here, there and everywhere, attending to the wounded; officials, like the one with Harry, were questioning those members of Freiheit not bleeding too profusely; aurors were binding Voldemort's followers who were still standing and transporting them directly to the Ministry. Harry saw Lucius Malfoy with a nasty gash on his right arm being forced into handcuffs; he gave Harry a particularly venomous look before being escorted away. Harry rubbed his temples. A medi-wizard had healed his broken arm but it still ached, his stomach cramped and his eyes were stinging. "Harry," prompted Moody again. He closed his eyes, gritted his teeth and found his voice.

"We - I don't know how I survived the curse," he lied, "but I did - and Voldemort's disappeared." He raised his head, meeting Moody's eyes. "He's not gone forever though," he told him, "he'll try everything in his power to return, so the Philosopher's Stone must be destroyed." He rubbed his forehead. "You have to look into the mirror, and only someone who wants to find the stone but not use it will be able to get the stone out."

"How do you know all this Harry," asked Moody, bewildered, "how did you know about the mirror, how did you know the killing curse wouldn't work, would backfire?"

"I didn't," he lied again, "I was just trying to get to my sister, and he kept going on about a prophecy or something. I-I was just lucky I guess."

The questions kept coming. They wanted to know everything, but Harry couldn't tell them. His head was spinning; every time he closed his stinging eyes he saw Seamus looking at the sword driven into his stomach, or lying dead in the forest. They let him go eventually, saying they would need to come and talk to him again soon, but for now he'd better go home. He walked over, feet tripping every so often, to where Sarah was sitting being looked after by a medi-witch. She stood and wrapped her arms around

Harry; the witch left them to attend to someone else. Harry and Sarah found the others had moved from the forest into the entrance hall. Seamus was covered in a white sheet, just like all the rest. Parvati had lowered it to reveal his ashened face, peaceful and tranquil still, and was stroking his hair, tears falling gently down her face, her other hand grasping his lifeless one tightly. Hermione stood a little away from her, Draco standing awkwardly beside her. On seeing Harry he left her and walked quietly over; Hermione barely noticed.

"Severus made us this," said the blond boy softly, and showed them an ordinary looking Galleon; a portkey. "It'll take us back to your home, and then bring me back here." Harry blinked a couple of times. "You're coming with us?" was the first thing he said, he wasn't sure why. Draco nodded. "I think I should," was his only reply.

The six of them landed with a thud onto the front lawn of Godric's Hollow, though they were still a fair distance from the house. Parvati was still clinging resolutely to Seamus' body. Harry looked down towards the front door, Draco let go of the portkey and stood up, facing the same direction. "Help," whispered Harry inaudibly for the second time that night, willing his parents to come and rescue him, save him from this nightmare. As if on command the front door flew open. "Harry!" screamed his mother in relief, "Sarah!" She came racing up the length of the grass, James at her side, closely followed by Sirius and Remus. She skidded to a halt and scooped up her daughter, burying her face into her hair. Sarah burst into sobs and grasped onto her mother as if she planned never to let go. Hermione stood back with Draco, a numb, out of place look on both their faces. James then reached Harry and held him tightly by the shoulders. "Oh God," he said, "are you okay, are you alright?" Harry nodded slowly. "I'm fine," he said softly, "but - but Seamus." The words dried up in his throat. Sirius and Remus finally joined them. As Remus slowed to a halt his eyes widened, his hand raised to his mouth. Sirius grabbed his arm. "Oh no," he breathed, looking down at Seamus, "no - it can't be -" But it was. Lily gasped and turned Sarah's face away, but she had already seen it all. Remus dropped to his knees, and as Parvati watched him with saucer like eyes, he pulled back the cloth to look at

the wound. He froze like that for some time, until James, having seen equally as much, took his hand, and gently replaced the white material.

James picked his daughter up, Lily gently eased a shaking Parvati to her feet and helped her and Hermione walk to the house. Sirius carefully knelt down and slipped his arms under Seamus, the white cloth still draped over his torso and legs, his eyes closed as if he were sleeping. As he stood, Remus lent in and helped take some of the dead weight, and the two of them followed Lily. Harry was left standing with Draco, holding Gryffindor's sword uselessly at his side. He stared at the hilt, red jewels suddenly bright and sparkling as dawn broke for the second time. Draco was looking at Harry.

"You saved the world," he said, and edge of disbelief in his tone. "I do that a lot," responded Harry. Draco let a half, desperate laugh escape his lips.

"Yeah, I'm starting to get that feeling." They stood there a moment more. Draco opened his palm, revealing the coin-shaped portkey. "I have to go in a minute." Harry looked up; there were birds twittering in the bare, leafless trees. He let out a shuddery breath, the steam curling in the air, then put the sword back into its scabbard. "I'm sorry."

Harry looked at Draco. "You're sorry?" He nodded. "He was a good bloke, really, and he died for what he believed in, but I'm still sorry." It was Harry's turn to nod. "It's always the good that die young." "You didn't have to do it Harry," said Draco, making Harry frown. He didn't think he'd ever heard Draco call him by his first name. "You didn't have to but you did." Harry looked at him as he let out a sigh. "Thank you." He looked at his watch. "It's going to go off any second now," he explained, "but - I'll come and see you, yeah?" Harry couldn't help but raise his eyebrows. It wasn't because Draco was asking to see him again, or talking to him as if he were a friend, or even calling him by his Christian name; but because Harry himself wanted him to. He wanted to be friends with Draco. Harry nodded and put his hand on his shoulder. "Thank you Draco," he said.

The blond boy smiled, and then he was gone.

Harry sat on the sofa in his living room, absorbed by the steam floating off his hot mug of tea; if it hadn't been charmed it would have been cold long ago. Sirius was sitting beside him, talking to the Ministry officials who had showed up almost an hour ago. Hermione was on his other side holding his hand; she was cold and shaking even with the fire roaring in front of them. James and Remus had only just come back from Ireland. They had taken Seamus and Parvati home personally as soon as James could bear to part from his children; that was almost four hours ago. Lily was with Sarah in her room.

As James walked into the room from the kitchen the officials rose. They felt that Harry needed more time to come to terms with the events last night, and would return tomorrow. James knelt in front of his son and spoke to him; the same words as always. It wasn't his fault, he had done an amazing thing and Seamus wouldn't want him blaming himself; his parents didn't. There was nothing he could have done, the blade was cursed, poisoned, Seamus was dead as soon as it broke his skin. But he shouldn't have even been there in the first place, was all Harry kept thinking. Remus suggested they take Hermione home, Harry agreed and said he would come with them. So Remus helped Hermione to stand before going to the fireplace and throwing the glittering green powder into the flames. The three of them stepped in and were whisked off in no time to Kent.

As they stepped into the Floo Powder station they were greeted by the same guard Harry had seen last night. "My word!" he cried, "Mr Potter! I can't believe it - is it true what the Prophet's saying, did you really defeat He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named?" He rushed over to them, and stood eagerly before Harry, awaiting an answer. Harry was only able to nod. Remus took him and Hermione by the shoulder and escorted them quickly round the guard out into the bright November afternoon.

People were bustling around the streets in all directions; starting on early Christmas shopping perhaps, thought Harry. They made their way between the crowds, heading towards Hermione's home; past the netball court and through the park just as before, crossing the wobbly bridge (Harry swore it was going to completely topple over with three people trying to walk across it) before finally reaching her driveway. There was a police car sitting on it. Harry couldn't see how that was a good sign.

There was a big 'closed' sign hanging on the door as Hermione fumbled with gloved hands to get the key in the lock. The door swung open. "Hello?" she called timidly. There was a shriek from another room, and her mother and father came flying into the hallway. "Hermione," cried her mother and flung her arms around her daughter. "Where have you been? We've been worried sick - we thought you'd been kidnapped." She stepped back and surveyed Harry and Remus suspiciously, just as two police officers stepped into the hall. "Mum - I can explain everything," said Hermione quickly, but the police woman was already reaching for her radio. Remus had his wand pointed at them both before anyone could even blink. "Obliviate!" he cried, and a bright white light filled the room. Now the officers had plenty of time to blink. "W-what happened?" said one of them, rubbing his head. "You were called out on a false alarm," said Remus quickly, "sorry to have troubled you." "But-" said the other, looking at her notes. Hermione, picking up on what was happening, accidentally-on-purpose bumped into to her, making the clipboard fall. "Oh I'm so sorry," she said, stealthily detaching the top sheet detailing her parent's report of her disappearance, and crumpling it up in her hand. She closed the pad and gave it back. "Sorry to have troubled you," said Remus once again, and steered them to the door. Hermione's father didn't look to happy about this. "Now wait just a minute-" he began, as Remus hastily shut the door on the officers' heals.

"I apologise for this Mr Granger," said Harry tiredly, "but I promise we can explain everything." And that they did. They sat in the front room, all five of them, and talked for almost two hours, about Hermione being a witch, about Hogwarts, and about what had happened last night. The Grangers didn't believe much of it until Remus kindly gave them a demonstration by making Mrs Granger's collection of china plates dance around in mid air. Harry listened to most of it, letting Remus and Hermione do all the talking. His mind wandered, thinking about the last day or so. It was only about this time yesterday, perhaps a bit later, he'd woken up in a bed that wasn't his, in a world that wasn't his, with a mother that hadn't been his for just over fourteen years. He thought about Sirius,

in this world and his own. He thought about his family, and Ron. He thought about Seamus. He had to look down into his lap so as the others wouldn't see his eyes getting itchy and red once more. He felt empty, totally lacking in any idea of what he should do. He wanted to go home because that's what he knew, but he desperately didn't want to leave his parents, his sister, his godfather, or even poor Hermione, suddenly flung into this terrifying new world. But he wanted Ron, he wanted Seamus, he wanted Hogwarts. He wanted to be home. Remus brought his mind back round by standing up; Harry followed suit. The Grangers needed time to think about what they'd been told, to talk to Hermione in private. Harry and Remus apologised once more, then said their goodbyes. Harry hugged Hermione tightly. "I'll see you soon," he promised. She looked at him. "What are you going to do about." she let the sentence trail. Harry shook his head. "I'll think of something, don't worry about it now." He smiled and hugged her again. She really was a great friend.

When Harry and Remus fell through the fireplace at Godric's Hollow it was gone three in the afternoon and Lily was stood waiting for them. She wrapped her arms around Harry and told Remus that James was in Sarah's room. He went up to join him. Sirius appeared quietly from the kitchen. "Harry," he said, "could I talk to you?" Harry nodded and Lily let go of him, following Remus up the stairs, past the wall with all the smiling photographs. Harry and Sirius walked into the kitchen, where Sirius sat down, indicating for Harry to join him. He looked concerned. "How are you doing Harry," asked his Godfather sympathetically. If it had been almost anybody else, Harry would have most likely snapped 'how do you think I'm doing?!', but because it was Sirius he just lent on the table, head in his hands. "I'm doing alright - really," he said, looking determinedly at the grain running along in the wood of the table. Sirius rubbed his back and stroked his hair. "You're amazing Harry," he said softly. Harry said nothing. Sirius took his hand away and fingered something in his hands; Harry had only just noticed it, but he was holding what looked like a letter. Sirius exhaled slowly. "Harry," he started, "do you remember what you asked me to do, before you left for Germany?" Harry looked at his Godfather. He had actually forgot, with all the talk of Voldemort

and Seamus, that he had asked Sirius to search through his parents' collection of books to see if there was anything at all about parallel universes or alternate realities. He nodded, so Sirius carried on. "Well, I can't say I wasn't a little put out by it, but I did it anyway." He looked down at the letter in his hand again and thought for a moment. "I didn't have much luck to be honest - I wasn't even too sure what I was looking for, but then - something happened." Sirius looked at Harry. "I didn't want to say before, you had so much to think of, all those questions about You-Know-Who, and Seamus. But, I think it's important, very important. "I was in here," he began, indicating the kitchen, "looking through what little books I had, when something happened," he repeated again. "The ground started shaking, and it was as if, all of a sudden, I was seeing double; two of everything, except I wasn't just seeing it, there really was two of everything, I held my hand out in front of me (an action he now repeated) and it was as if I was out of sync or something." He shook his head. "Anyway, I looked up, and this was sitting on the table." He held up the letter and looked at it. "The only thing was, there was definitely only one of them; two tables, but one letter. But then, it was like somebody snapped an elastic band, and the two images shot back together - leaving this here." He continued to look thoughtfully at the letter. "I was the only one who noticed anything - your parents were upstairs with Moony and you said not to trouble them with anything else, something I readily agreed with." Sirius leant back in the chair, dropping the letter on the table. "At first I thought it was something to do with You-Know-Who, so I did all sorts of charms on it to deactivate any curses it might have held, but it didn't have anything like that. Because I blasted it with so much magic though, it just sort of fell open - couldn't cope I suppose." He rubbed his chin. "I read the letter Harry - I'm really sorry, I know it has your name on the front and everything, but it was open anyway, and I was worried." He pushed the cream parchment over to Harry, who looked at it, but did not take it. Sirius sighed. "I think I know why you wanted me to find out about parallel universes for you," he said simply. Harry was no longer feeling tired; quite the opposite. His eyes were clear and wide, his back straight and tense, his fingers tingling as he reached forward and rested his hand on the think cream parchment. He looked purposefully at Sirius, then gently picked the letter off the table. He slid his index finger along the lip of the envelope and he

pulled the contents out; two sheets of paper with bright green ink scrawled tightly over all four sides. Harry let a shaky breath escape his lips, and, swallowing hard, began to read. Dear Harry, I hope this letter reaches you intact, or at all for that matter. Harry's grip on the parchment tightened involuntarily. He knew this writing; it was Hermione's. His Hermione's. We have talked at length with Professor Dumbledore about your disappearance, and have been researching in the Restricted Section of the library; we had to borrow your Invisibility Cloak for this task, we hope that was-? ??-??+

I'm getting to that Ron! Harry couldn't help but laugh a little. He could almost hear his friends voices in his head; they were obviously using Hermione's Quick Quotes Quill Harry had brought her for her birthday to write down what they were saying.

The book we found was "The Boundaries of The Universe" by Estella Linyar, and it talked about something called a 'dimensional hotspot.' We believe (and professor Dumbledore agrees) that you opened a type of. ??

I was going to say gateway between the delicate fabrics of the space-time continuum Ron, but whatever works for you. ?? Oh honestly! Right, Harry, from what we can tell from 'Hogwarts; A History,' the History classroom, or more specifically, the space just outside the window, is one of these so-called 'hotspots', a link between two 'dimensions.' ??-??

Thank you Ron. When you broke the window you somehow activated the portal and travelled through it, though we're not entirely sure how as it would have required an incredible amount of focused energy. Dumbledore has repaired the window, but he cast a number of charms on the area, and from what he can tell, your passage has somehow weakened the gateway, enabling us to send this letter through to wherever it is you have ended up. Harry looked up at Sirius in disbelief. "Keep reading," was all he said. It is our hope that this letter will create a sort of 'thread' and pull you back into this reality. ??- ??

That's not helpful Ron. ??-??- ?+?? ?? Well, that's the thing Harry; this is our only hope. If you find this letter, you just have to perform a simple activation charm on it to release the spell Dumbledore put on it. Now the window's back together, you should return to this spot instantaneously. ??

Harry felt his stomach clench; he could get home as easy as that? "Just like the Wizard of Oz, hey Harry?" He looked at Sirius, but remained silent, not really too sure what to say. Sirius smiled and carried on. "I knew there was something different about you Harry, as soon as I saw you I knew something was wrong - I just couldn't put my finger on it."

He stood up and walked slowly towards the window; he watched the leaves blowing about in the fierce autumn breezes for a moment before continuing. "That's how you knew about Peter, isn't it? It's what you meant about 'they're supposed to be dead', why you went to fight You-Know-You." He turned and looked at Harry. "You know things you shouldn't, seen things, had experiences that set you apart. Harry; you're not who you seem - are you?" Harry looked at the letter, still only half read in his hands. "I'm from a different reality," he said quietly.

Sirius nodded. "I studied something when I took my N.E.W.T.s about these 'hotspots' here; your friend said it's mentioned in Hogwarts; A History, so I guess that's where I saw it. But it was theoretical Harry, never once was there a mention, a reference to it actually happening!"

"It was an accident," said Harry by way of an explanation. Sirius looked thoughtful for a while. "Harry," he said carefully, "it really would have taken a tremendous amount of energy to activate that portal." Harry nodded, but didn't look up from the letter. He wanted to continue reading, to find out what the rest of the letter said, but he was having trouble concentrating.

"There's more in that letter," said Sirius, almost as if he were reading Harry's thoughts, " and I think I might have an idea as to how you did it. Opened the gateway." Harry looked up at him; Sirius sighed. "Don't get me wrong," he said, "I don't think your life here is all peaches and cream, but from what I've read, things seem a Hell of a lot worse for you over there." He paused for a second. "For both of us it seems." "What do you mean?" said Harry, a note of urgency creeping into his voice. Sirius didn't say anything; he just reached over the table, flipped the letter over and pointed to a passage about halfway down.

??-??-??

Yes I know Ron.okay, Harry, there was more in the paper today. The Ministry is going to perform the Dementor's kiss on Monday morning. They aren't even giving Sirius a re-trail. Harry gasped audibly and felt like a sheet of ice had just descended

in his stomach. He kept reading without needing to be told be Sirius. ??-??+

No - it's not I'm afraid. They've got Lupin in as well now; he's being questioned on charges of aiding and abetting a wanted criminal, and he's facing a life sentence in Azkaban. ??-??-??- ?? We don't know what to do Harry. Harry felt sick; really sick. He stumbled off his chair, head spinning, and threw up in the sink. "Harry?" said Sirius gingerly. He wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his jumper and took in a shuddery breath of air.

"Oh God," he whispered, leaning over the counter. "Harry," said Sirius once again, "what did he - I do? Is this real?" Harry was only able to nod in response to the second question. After a moment or two, he answered the first. "Nothing."

Sirius folded his arms and stared at the ground; he looked deeply troubled but thoughtful. "I've been thinking about this for - well hours Harry - lets say that letter bothered me just a bit." He walked to the other side of the room, and Harry looked at him, back leaning against the counter. "Okay.here's what I think. "I think, as we've discussed.you're from another reality. I think, in this reality, You-Know-Who was after your family, just like here. But, from what you said in the living room before, there was one important difference; James and Lily chose Peter to be their Secret Keeper, not me. When he betrayed them, everyone assumed it would have been me that they had chosen, so now I'm on trail for helping You-Know-You in their - their murder, and so is Moony for helping me." He looked at Harry. "How am I doing?" he asked quietly. But Harry's face crumpled. He balled his fists together and shoved himself off the counter. "Oh God - no Sirius! It's so much worse than that!" he cried. He started pacing the room, head spinning, and found himself spilling the entire sorry story to Sirius, desperate for commiseration, for someone to understand and help him. "Wormtail didn't hand my parents over last week, last month - it was fourteen years ago! My parents knew Voldemort was after them, so they did make you their Secret Keeper, my dad wouldn't trust anyone else, not even Dumbledore, but you knew Voldemort would guess it was you so you convinced them to switch to Wormtail, thinking no-one would think it was him, and you could act as a diversion. No one else knew, not even Remus. You went to check on him at Hallowe'en

- he'd vanished, so you came here - and found my parents dead, and me bloodstained and crying in the ruins-"  
"Oh my God.what - how?" cried Sirius, interrupting him, horror in his voice, "how did you live? What happened to You-Know-Who?"  
"My mother sacrificed herself to try and save me," replied Harry, tears welling in his eyes, walking back to the other side of the kitchen. "It cancelled out the killing curse, rebounded on him, it's how I survived last night." He rubbed frustrated hands through his dirty hair.  
"Hagrid was there too though - at the house," he carried on, "he had orders from Dumbledore to take me straight to him, and wouldn't let you have me."

Sirius pressed his fingers into his temples. "Oh God," he whispered.  
"So you tracked Wormtail down on a crowded muggle street to confront him.to kill him for what he'd done. But before you had a chance he yelled to everyone how you had betrayed my mum and dad and then blew the street apart - killing twelve muggles and letting him fake his own death by fleeing down the sewer with all the other rats.

"You had no witnesses - you were charged with killing all of them as well as being a traitor, and they sent you to Azkaban without a trial!"  
"What! cried Sirius.

"Bartemius Crouch Senior wanted to be Minister of Magic, so he made you an example, ironic - as his own son was discovered to be a Death Eater not two weeks later." Harry crossed the room again. "So you were stuck in that prison for years whilst Wormtail lived cosily as a pet rat with the Weasleys of all people. Then one day, two years ago, you saw them, and Wormtail, in the paper, so you escaped-

"I what?! From - Azkaban?!"

Harry nodded. "As a dog. Then you travelled to Hogwarts to find him. It took you a whole year, but eventually you and Remus were able to tell me, Ron and Hermione everything, show Wormtail for what he really was one night in the Shrieking Shack. But then he escaped before we could prove it to anyone; you've been on the run ever since, and Wormtail has helped Voldemort back to full strength." Harry crossed the room once more. "And now, Voldemort's terrorising the world again, recruiting old and new followers, killing muggles and wizards. But that's not it!" He grabbed up the letter and shook it at Sirius. "The Ministry's recaptured you! There going to suck out your soul without even asking you what happened!" He slammed the parchment back on the table and fell into his chair,

head in his hands. Sirius was stunned, his eyes wide and fixed on Harry. "I just - I can't believe it," he said hoarsely. "Yeah, well, it's true," said Harry thickly, rubbing his sleeve into his eyes. "That's why I was able to open that portal; I knew there was nothing I could do and I couldn't cope!" Sirius took in a sharp breath between his teeth, walked over to him, yanked out the chair beside him, and sat down.

"Don't go back Harry - stay here."

"W-what?" asked Harry, looking up at him. Sirius took his hand. "You don't have to go back to that - that nightmare, you've got a loving family here, stay here."

Harry looked at his Godfather. That was so like him; thinking with his heart, not his head, not considering the consequences. Harry sighed, oddly a little calmer than before; perhaps he just felt better for talking to someone, for having the prospect of help and comfort. And perhaps a resolution.

"I have to go back - don't you see?" he said, "it's my home - I don't belong here, there's another Harry out there somewhere who does, and I can't take his place -take his family."

Sirius looked down at their hands. "I know," he said, "but I can't bear the thought of you being there-

"And I can't bear the thought of you being in Azkaban even one more day, but that's just the way it is. It's not fair, but nothing is: Seamus was a decent boy and he died, all those other people too - my parents, they died just because some maniac wanted to rule the world his way. Nothing's fair I think, but there's nothing we can do about it."

They sat in silence for a while. "But there are things we can do, Harry." He looked up at his Godfather. "You've proved it; you've faced You-Know-Who twice now-

Harry gave a hollow laugh. "Try five times now."

Sirius looked at him stunned for a moment, before deciding not to question that and carry on with what he was saying. "My point is," he said gently, "is that you've already changed things. You've changed this world Harry; you alone, and it's going to be a better place because of it. Think of how many live you've saved by stopping him; you did that, just one person, and you've made such a difference."

Harry bit his lip. "I think you're right Harry; you've got to go back. But you've got to promise me this one thing; never, for as long as you live, ever give up." He squeezed Harry's hand. "You're my best friend's

son, Harry Potter, but I swear to God, I don't think anyone loves you more than I do. You're the best of all of us; you're brave and resourceful, you put everyone else before you and you never give up. You're everything I wish I could be, and I want you to keep going, for me - but you owe it to yourself." Harry looked Sirius in the eye; they both had a symmetrical tear running down their cheeks. "I believe in you Harry. Don't give up on me now."

Harry stood outside Sarah's bedroom. He took a deep breath and knocked. "Come in," came his dad's voice from the other side. Harry did as he was told and pushed open the wooden door covered in fluttering carved butterflies, and stepped into Sarah's bedroom. She was propped up against her pillows, a mug with snitches on in her hands. James and Lily were sitting beside her on the left, Remus was on the right. They all looked up as he came in. "Hi Harry," said his mother, "pull up a chair." But Harry didn't move. It took a moment to get his voice working, but he knew what he wanted to say, and he wanted to say it fast and get out. "I just wanted to say - I'm sorry. I'm sorry for everything, but I love you, very much, and I'll never forget you, not for as long as I live. Sirius will explain everything, but this has meant the world to me, and I know your son is very lucky to have you for a family." He swallowed as tears welled in his eyes again. "Goodbye," he said, and turned on his heals, pulling the door shut behind him. He ignored their startled cries as he locked the door; it would give him a moment or two at least.

He bolted down the stairs, not thinking about his mother, his father, his sister, or how he would never, ever see them again. Sirius was waiting for him in the kitchen; he handed him the letter. "Just point your wand and say 'Abbercium', okay?" Harry nodded. Sirius hugged him tightly as Sarah's door banged open upstairs and the sound of running feet met their ears.

"Tell Hermione what happened, okay," Harry told his Godfather quickly, "a-and the others, find the others who weren't called to Hogwarts - tell them the truth." Sirius nodded and hugged him one last time.

Harry ran and stood in the middle of the room, closing his eyes. "Goodbye," he whispered for the last time. He pointed his wand at the parchment and uttered the spell.

The room exploded with light and thunder roared above him. Sirius jumped back, hands over his ears, as the others reached the kitchen doorway. Harry lurched forward; a distinct feeling of watching himself do so as he hurtled through the barrier, back to his own world. And then, once more, the world was black.

Harry opened his eyes to darkness. After a few moments though, moonlight through the window enabled him to see where he was. He was back in the History of Magic classroom, shattered glass from the once again broken window lying all around him. He put his hand on his aching forehead and caught a glimpse of the time; 5:17. He'd barely been out for an hour this time. He propped himself up and looked at his clothes; the same ones he had been Wednesday night when he'd vanished from this world.

And so he was home. Overwhelmed with emotion, Harry dropped back down again onto the glass, curled into a ball, and began to shake. He grieved. He grieved for parents he never even knew, a sister who would never be born. He grieved for Seamus and his family, for Parvati, Hermione, Draco. He grieved for the fate of Sirius and Remus. He lay like that for a long while, so many thoughts racing through his head it made him dizzy. He gradually relaxed his cramped position, until eventually rolling onto his back, making the glass crunch. His eyes were stinging and his breath was still shuddering, but he was feeling slightly calmer once more. He ran his hands through his now clean hair and stared at the ceiling. The conversation he'd had with Sirius was replaying over and over in his head. He didn't want to give up, he really didn't, but what could he do? Maybe he would ask Dumbledore for help. Harry thought of the advice Dumbledore had given him in the past, thought of his transformation last year when he had confronted the Moody impostor. He believed in Sirius. He always seemed to know the right thing to do. Harry thought about the Mirror of Erised; how he had asked Dumbledore what he saw when he looked at his reflection, wondered if he was one of those perfect people he had talked about and would see himself as he was, and he then thought what he himself might have seen if he'd looked in the mirror last night. Harry sighed once more. Looking in that mirror had been the closest thing Harry thought he would ever get to seeing his parents again. But the last couple of days well, what could he say?

The advice Dumbledore had given to Harry on that specific night four years ago swam into his thoughts. Those words had stuck with Harry so clearly ever since, but for the first real time, he thought long and hard about what they really meant. "It does not do to dwell on dreams Harry, and forget to live." Those had been his exact words. Harry frowned and sat up. Sirius was right. He had changed the world, and he had seen things he never should have seen. He was special. If Fudge didn't want to do anything to help Sirius, well Harry was just going to have to do it himself.

He stood, a freshness filling in his mind, clearing it properly for the first time since Wednesday morning. He brushed the broken shards of glass of his clothes before repairing the window with a quick flick of his wand. He grabbed the handle of the door, heaved it open, and stepped out into the castle corridor. His mind made up, he began walking quickly towards the Gryffindor common room. As it was almost six o'clock, most people should have been down in the Great Hall having dinner; but it wasn't long before Harry ran into someone he knew all too well. "Potter!" came a contemptuous voice from behind him. Harry turned round, and was faced with Draco Malfoy striding arrogantly up towards him.

Harry raised his eyebrows. His first thought was just how much smaller he looked. His hair was immaculate, and his face was pinched. A smirk curled round his lips. "Well if it isn't old Scarhead," he spat out, his voice clipped and shrill, "thought you'd be hiding out until at least Sunday, or have you decided you want me to knock you off your broom after all?"

Harry just stared at him, incredulous to just how different he was to the Draco that he had known these last twenty four hours or so. Malfoy leaned in, staring at him. "The Quidditch match on Saturday, Potter, I asked you if you were scared?"

But Harry just tilted his head to the side, looking at the Slytherin boy before him, and felt a smile creep onto in face. "What?" demanded Malfoy, his hand flying up to his hair. "What are you laughing at?" But Harry's smile just broadened, and he chuckled softly to himself.

"Potter, I swear-"

Harry interrupted him. He took a step closer to him, making the blond boy jump and step back against the wall. Their faces were quite close

together; for this world anyway. Harry folded his arms. "What the Hell are you playing at Potter?!" cried Malfoy, furious. But Harry just laughed again. "I see right through you Draco," he said, using his Christian name for the first, and perhaps last time. "You're all for show, and the sad thing is, you don't even know it yourself. But I do, I know who you really are; I see right through you." Harry allowed himself the slightest of grins as he stepped forward once more, so Malfoy was only a few inches away from his face. Malfoy, alarmed, backed fully against the wall, a mixture of fury and confusion alright in his eyes. "In fact," Harry carried on, "I can see through you so easily, I'm going to bet you're wearing pink underwear right now." All the colour drained from Malfoy's already pale face, before quickly changing to the shade of the afore mentioned underwear. He spluttered and looked as if his eyes were going to pop out of his head. Harry gave him half a knowing smile, then turned his back on him, continuing up the corridor to the common room, leaving Malfoy to his embarrassment and anger behind him.

The fat lady was startled when Harry hurried up to her. "Where on Earth have you been?" she cried, but Harry ignored her. He told her the password ("cauldron cakes") and jumped inside. He ran through the common room, heading towards his own bedroom. He almost didn't notice the people sitting there. A group of second years were huddled by the fireplace, talking, reading, and doing their homework. As Harry went past them, Dennis Creevey gasped. "Harry!" he cried, making the others jump round in their chairs. Harry flew past them though without even looking round. As he took the stairs two at a time they all slammed back their chairs and ran after him. Harry banged open his bedroom door and pulled his trunk from under his bed; yanking the lid open, it only took a couple of seconds to find what he was looking for. His father's Invisibility Cloak. Just as he flung it over his head, two of the second years, Dennis and another boy Harry didn't know, came pelting into the room. Harry stood quietly up as the boys looked around the empty room, confused. Natalie McDonald charged in after them; Harry knew her as she was the new reserve chaser for Gryffindor's Quidditch team. "Where is he?" she panted.

"I dunno," said Dennis, "he definitely came in here, and that's his trunk opened over there."

"Was it really him?" squeaked another girl beside Natalie. Dennis nodded.

"Definitely," he said resolutely.

"I think we need to get Dumbledore," said Natalie. The others agreed and ran back down the stairs. Harry watched them go. He readjusted the cloak on his shoulders, closed his trunk, and hurried over to the door. He had wanted the cloak precisely for that reason. He knew everyone would have been really worried about him, and all they would want now was answers to their questions, to fuss over him. And Harry was quite happy for them to do that, he knew they needed to, but he had things to do first. He ran back through the common room and pushed the portrait of the fat lady open hastily, making her jump. He raced along the corridors and down the stairs, taking all the short-cuts he knew to the Great Hall; he wanted to get there before the second years. One of the doors was ajar when he reached it; just enough for him to peer in and see the tables. His heart caught in his mouth as his eyes found the Gryffindor table. Ron, with his shinning red hair, was sitting next to Hermione, who looked like she hadn't eaten or slept since Harry's departure two days ago. Seamus was opposite them, very much alive, and talking with Dean Thomas. Ginny and the twins were sitting by Ron, looking just as sick with worry as he did, and a little further down Harry could see Parvati sitting with her best friend Lavender Brown. They were all here; they were alive and they were okay.

The sound of running feet pounding on the stone enabled Harry to step out of the way just in time. The second years hurtled themselves at the doors just as Harry moved away from it. The doors flew fully open on their hinges and banged into the wall, making everyone in the hall stop talking and turn round in surprise. Natalie McDonald, who was in the lead, was the first to recover her breath and speak. She leant on her knees for a second, before straightening and addressing the teacher's table. "Professor Dumbledore!" she cried as the headmaster rose to his feet, "we've just seen Harry Potter!"

The hall erupted with noise. Ron and Hermione knocked over their chairs unceremoniously in the effort to reach the second years as quickly as possible. As Ron grabbed Natalie by the shoulders,

Dumbledore fired a blue explosion out of his wand, calling for silence. Everybody stopped moving. Ron and Hermione were both crouched in front of the young chaser. "What do mean," said Ron, trying to remain calm, "where did you see him?"

"In the common room, just now," said Natalie loud enough so everyone could here. "We all saw him, I swear Professor, but then he disappeared"

Dumbledore didn't need convincing. Orders were quickly given to search the castle, but Harry didn't stay long enough to find out the particulars; he had already stayed too long. He turned and headed towards the dungeons. It was as freezing as ever down there, but Harry didn't let that slow him down. He kept running until he was in front of Snape's huge potion cupboard; he soon unlocked the doors and started rummaging round for what he wanted. He found the first item almost instantly, but the second, the one he needed most, didn't seem to be there. Frustrated, he moved up to the top shelves, desperate to find what he wanted before someone came; he may have been invisible, but it wouldn't take a genius to question why glass bottles were floating round seemingly of their own accord.

Finally, in the very corner of the second to highest shelf, he found the tiny phial tucked away at the back. Relieved, he picked the other item off the floor, closed and sealed the cupboard doors, and put both items into his pocket.

As he did, however, he realised there was already something else in it. Frowning, he reached over with his other hand and pulled the mysterious item out. It was a photograph. Harry gasped and almost dropped what he had just taken from Snape's cupboard. In his hand was the photo he had taken from the stairway in his home; from the other reality. He watched in amazement as his family smiled and waved at him, and almost forgot what he was doing. Only the sound of Snape's footsteps stopped him wondering how on Earth the photo had found its way home with him. But then he remembered (as he pressed into the wall and slipped past his potions master) how suspiciously familiar his wand had looked back in his bedroom yesterday.

Even though he was invisible, Harry had a very hard time getting to his next location unnoticed, as so many people kept almost running

into him; it would have been awful to get caught now when he was so close.

Eventually he made it to McGonagall's office. He opened the door slowly, and when he was convinced there was no one inside, he darted in and locked the door. He stood in front of the fireplace and fished the small bag of glittery purple Floo Powder from his pocket and poured some out. This was actually the third fireplace he had tried to travel from in the last half hour; the one in the old History of Magic classroom had been impossible to reach due to the large amount of people searching around for clues of his arrival, and the Gryffindor common room had no longer been empty, but packed with students waiting for news.

Harry pulled his dad's cloak off and stuffed it into his pocket. Taking a deep breath, he threw a handful of the powder into the grate and stepped in. "The Minister of Magic!" he cried, and was whisked away in a swirl of green flame.

The fireplace Harry was flung out of was very grand and made of white marble. He managed to keep his balance as he stumbled into a short corridor (also made of white marble) with a red carpet laid out in front of him. Waist high gold posts, connected with a thick red chord, ran along either side of him until the end of the corridor, where there stood a very tidy desk. There were sleepy portraits of previous Ministers hanging from the wall.

A young Ministry official was sitting at the desk looking startled at Harry's arrival. He recovered himself quickly though; he stood and came round the desk as Harry walked on the carpet towards him. "Just what do you think you're doing young man?" cried the official, "not only is this office closed for the weekend, but this entrance is reserved for foreign dignitaries and—"

"Let me guess," interrupted Harry, "visitors from Hogwarts?" The man looked extremely agitated; he had his hair slicked black and obviously thought himself very important. "Teachers from Hogwarts, not students," he said. He slowed as Harry came closer to him. "Hey - wait a second," he said startled, "aren't you—" "Is the Minister in?" asked Harry, not waiting for the official to say his name.

The man regained his composure. "As I said, the office is clo—" "Is he in?" cried Harry. He really couldn't be bothered with this. The

official folded his arms as they both came to a halt and faced each other.

"You need an appointment to see The Minister of Magic, funnily enough, and I'm not sure he would wish to be associating himself with you anyway, Mr Potter."

Harry fixed him with a stony glare. "Been reading the Daily Prophet have we?" he said scathingly. "If you want my advice, I wouldn't bother; you might work out the truth of what's going on these days a bit quicker and do us all a favour."

"You are a deranged, trouble-making liar," snapped Mr immaculate-hair, "and there is no way by Merlin's beard you are getting to see the Minister."

Harry moved forward, close to the official, making him lean back. "Stop me," was all he said. He strode past him and turned right at the end of the corridor.

"Oi! Stop right there!" he yelled. Harry kept walking. "I mean it!" Harry turned to face him. "I will curse you if I have to," he threatened, playing up the man's impression of him from the Prophet. He raised his wand. "Either I am mad and deranged, or I really did take on Voldemort and win last summer. Take your pick; in any case, your odds aren't looking good."

The official stopped walking; he was looking distinctly ruffled now. "I'm getting security!" he called out to him. "Fine," snapped Harry, "all I want is to talk to Fudge, but if it makes you feel better, go right ahead." He turned on his heals and walked towards the big, white doors with golden handles; the Minister's office. He grasped the handles and pulled the doors towards him. He stepped into the dimly lit office and locked the doors behind him. He was in a large room, nicely decorated, with a large mahogany desk standing in front of him. Cornelius Fudge was sitting at that desk. He looked up from his reading at the sound of his door opening. "And what, may I ask, is the meaning of this?" he said curtly as the doors closed.

"Good evening Minister," said Harry pleasantly and walked over to the desk.

"Oh - eh - Mr Potter-" he said, a little high pitched, and hastily shuffled his papers out of site. "This is most inappropriate, you - I must ask you to leave at once."

"Not until you hear what I have to say." Harry stopped in front of the

Minister, looking him directly in the eye. Fudge gritted his teeth, then made a sudden movement across his desk, reaching towards a small misty emerald globe. Harry had his wand pointed at his chest though before he could get much further. "Please don't call anyone in here," he said calmly, "I only want to talk to you." Fudge looked contemptuously at him. "Security will undoubtedly be on their way anyway," he snapped. "Undoubtedly," said Harry. There was silence for a moment. "Oh fine," cried Fudge and drew his hand sharply back from the globe, "what is it you wish to say; you have five minutes." Harry smiled. "More than enough time." He lifted his wand away from Fudge and held it carefully between his fingers. He turned round, casually looking about. "Well, isn't this nice Fudge?" he asked, humouring himself, mimicking Draco's words from earlier. "You are wasting my time boy. There is no reason for me to sit here and listen once again to your ridiculous claims about He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, or insinuating respectable members of our community, so just—" "I wanted to talk about Sirius Black, actually." All trace of humour was gone from Harry's voice. Fudge raised his eyebrows. "Black is a murderer." "He is my Godfather," replied Harry. Fudge's eyes narrowed dangerously. "I have always questioned your participation in Black's escape from Hogwarts School," he said, "I seem to remember then you tried to tell us all some tall tail about Black, I flattered you it was some sort of residual effect from a curse of Black's, but - perhaps not." Harry's expression was fixed; he let Fudge's statement hang in the air until it became uncomfortable. "Are you scared of what I have to say, Minister?" "Of course not," said Fudge quickly, "Black is a wanted criminal, who murdered thirteen people, not to mention betrayed your parents Mr Potter. Or did no one tell you that?" he added cruelly. Harry laughed at him. "Of course I've been told that, it's just not true." "Black was sentenced to Azkaban fourteen years ago, Mr Potter," cried Fudge, getting more and more agitated, "there is no question of his guilt." "Ahh," said Harry in mock surprise, "was that why there was never any trial?" Fudge sucked his breath through his teeth. "He was convicted, Mr

Potter, of murder. He is now being held for escaping from his punishment for that crime, and will serve justice accordingly. We do not have the time to review-

"But there was never a trial!" yelled Harry.

"The facts are right in front of us, Mr Potter, whether you like them or not. I can't imagine what your problem is quite frankly; he is responsible for the death of your parents."

Harry stared at the man in front of him disbelievingly. "What facts," he whispered, "did you even ask him what happened?"

"You expect him to tell the truth do you Mr Potter? He is a murderer, plain and simple."

Harry could take it any more. "Good GOD!" he exploded, hands thrown open in front of him. "It makes it so much easier for you doesn't it? You execute Sirius and all your problems are solved - well that's just bullshit! Get your goddamn head out of the goddamn sand and take a look around! Voldemort has returned because Peter Pettigrew helped him to, Pettigrew was the one who betrayed my parents and framed Sirius."

Fudge looked furious. "I have had enough of this nonsense Potter," he said after a moment, "your five minutes are up." He reached once more for the emerald globe, but this time Harry shot his own hand out, and caught Fudge's easily with his Seeker instinct. "You may be scared of the truth Minister," he said, looking down into his eyes, "but I am not." Using his other hand, Harry reached into his pocket and found the tiny phial of Veritaserum he had taken from Snape's cupboard.

As the guards began banging and yelling from the other side of the Minister's locked door, Harry turned Fudge's hand over, and placed the truth potion into his open palm.

"Now, are you going to prove Sirius' innocence, or shall I?"

The End

## Author's Notes and Deleted Scenes

Hey there! Here's an extra chapter, just for your entertainment :-) First we have a quick message from me to my adoring fans (or perhaps that should be 'those with the most patience to have stuck it out for this long!') And secondly there are a couple of 'deleted scenes', basically extra ones I wrote for fun that run along with the plot :-) Enjoy!

Helen J Haslam xxx

## Author's Notes

Well.that's it isn't it? Almost two years of my life it's taken to get my baby out into the world, and I've loved every minute of it - even when I was screaming at the screen and crying coz I had no clue what the Hell I was going to write next :-) There are so many thanx to be said I hardly know where to start. This was the first real piece of writing I've done in my life, and responsibility for it's birth has to go first and foremost to the magnificent JKRowling, to whom we all owe so much. Thank you. The great people at Fiction Alley and also get a whole load of my love for making it possible to post my story out to the world, may their be many more to come. Thank you to my fabulous family for all their support and Beta reading; To Dwell On Dreams would be a lot worse off without them and not half as enjoyable in the end. And finally, where would I be without all those amazing people who have taken the time to read my work, and also, my favourite, those who comment. For you guys, here's some things I'd like to say:

SiriuslyObsessed My dear Stephanie, thank you a million times for all your interest and constant support from the start. You really inspired me and kept me going through those last couple of chapters, you're a star. I hope you like some of my other stuff as your opinion is important to me. Thank you once again, and keep going with your own writing, coz you know I'll keep reading it :-)

Broken Angel I'm so glad I was able to improve on your initial expectations and I'm thankful you've stuck it out till the end, I hope I didn't disappoint. It's great to have someone like you around to watch my back, coz you'd tell me if it all went Pete Tong!

MChipie36 Thank you for your e-mails Cécile - don't worry - you didn't say the 'wrong' thing! I hope I didn't disappoint when I said you had no idea what was coming, and I'm glad to have found a fellow Draco obsessive!

LyssasPen I'm very flattered to think this is the best story you've ever read - that makes me go all warm and fuzzy! I know how hard it is to keep up with all the fics out there - it takes me ages to get through all mine :- ) I hope you like the conclusion.

Aaralyn and Phooka1 Thank you so much for the German corrections!! I speak not one single word of German at all - so I'm actually dead chuffed you had any idea what I was talking about! I'm going to reload the chapters soon with a couple of alterations, so I'll add the correct German then :-)

gtownbrowneyes Thanx for the correct spelling of 'pog mo thoin', which is Irish for 'kiss my arse! in case you guys didn't know! I'm glad you like the characters and their development, that's an aspect I work very hard on :-)

Bailey James Well, Christina, you said way, seriously too many nice things about my work for me to even think about, so I'll just say thank you for all of them! I would say though, I was thrilled when you said it was like I really great movie - coz I kinda want to make movies for a living - so maybe I've got a shot hey?!

Kateydidnt You kinda guessed the rest of the plot.bugger! But go you! And thanx for leaving such a long review, I like those :-)

Leenya I'm sorry it wasn't slash in the end! I'm glad you enjoyed it anyway :-) I'm thinking about writing some H/D slash in another story - just to see if I can do it better than the people who do it badly and cause me to yell at them! So keep an eye out :-)

Draco4Ever You make me laugh! Thank you for your reliable reviews, and I hope you like the end :-)

Anilia Profanities aside, I'm really glad you like my fic! God, tell me about it - it certainly felt like twenty chapters when I was writing it!

I know there are many more of you guys out there who have taken the chance to review - so I want to say thank you to all of you guys as well - you rock! In response to the wonderings of both SunKitten and infinitedelusions, I've had a few people questioning why I don't have more reviews than I do. I would like to say this to you. I have had so many more reviews than I ever dreamed of, every single one of you guys are magic, and I would like to quote something the magnificent Joss Whedon once said about his creation Buffy the Vampire Slayer: 'I would rather have a hundred people who need to watch the show, than a thousand people who like to watch the show.' He was so right (as it turned out, he ended up with a good few million people who need to watch the show, but that's beside the point :-) I don't need hundreds of reviews (although it would be nice!) because I've got a handful of people here who have inspired me to greater heights with their support, and for me, that's more than enough. So thank you to you all :-)

Now, here's the thing. I've had a number of people telling me they can't believe this story is only seven chapters long, that it seems much longer or it should be longer. I've had questions about events outside the given narrative and requests, quite simply, for more. So would you be interested in a sequel? Nay, a trilogy? Because I have ideas.

If you are, holler loudly, and if you have any ideas, let me know, coz I'm interested :-)

Right, this is finally it from me. Below are the deleted scenes, I hope you like :-) Also (and I can't stress this enough!) if you like what you've read here, please, PLEASE look at some of my other stuff, especially Past, Present and Future, coz I've heard it's really good :-)

## Deleted Scenes

### The Weasleys

This is a scene I thought about, but found no real place for within the story itself. Kind of sad, it's what happened to the Weasleys in the alternate universe. I thought I could maybe use it as a prologue, but then I figured people wouldn't bother reading the rest if I killed cute little Ron off right at the beginning :-)

Summer 1989

The Weasleys were a very old, and very large wizarding family. As the sun dipped on that summer's evening, all nine of them could be found squashed around the scrubbed kitchen table finishing an impressive spread of food Mrs Weasley had prepared herself earlier that day. The house was called The Burrow, and was hidden away in a little village known as Ottery St Catchpole. Over many years the house had been added to; a cupboard here, a bathroom there, and consequently it looked a little like a lop- sided wedding cake. But nobody minded about that. The Weasley family had chosen to eat inside that evening due to an unusual amount of wasps in the garden that refused to be banished away, and as a result, the little kitchen was extremely packed with food, children, cutlery and owls. But nobody minded about that either. Bill Weasley, the oldest of the children stood up and tapped his goblet of pumpkin juice with a spoon. "I would like to make a toast," he said, "to all us Weasleys." His mother beamed, and Fred and George, the twins, giggled. "To our Dad, Arthur Weasley, for his well deserved promotion at the Ministry, so we can all look forward to being rich now." Everyone laughed, the Weasleys had never been rich and were never likely to be either. "To our dear Mum, Molly Weasley, for this fantastic meal and her continuing love and support for all us Rug Rats, I am truly surprised but grateful that you haven't killed any of us yet."

"Here here!" chimed in their father Arthur, making everyone laugh again.

"Now to me," Bill grinned; he seemed he was working from oldest to youngest Weasley, "congratulations on finally getting a job, I'll be sure and send you lots of sand from Egypt. To Charlie," Bill raised his glass to the next Weasley boy; he was well built and slightly burnt in places. "For finishing his time at Hogwarts with more NEWTS than you could shake a stick at, the Quidditch house cup in hand again, and all his limbs intact.no thanks to Professor Kettleburn I might add." Everyone laughed at this, that is except the littlest Weasley, Ginny, who didn't really think it was funny that a Dragon had tried to eat one of her brothers. "Now to Percy," continued Bill, "well done on his excellent Second Year exam results, we'll have another Head Boy in the family yet." Percy beamed. "And to Fred and George," this was said in a voice that suggested a

rain of toads was now forecast, "for inventing the now infamous shrinking underwear, and for not driving our lovely tutor Miss Bellot to any kind of institution that we know of. I'm sure she'll miss you very much when you're packed off to Hogwarts next year - God help them." More laughter as the twins looked offended by these comments.

"To our Ron," continued Bill with a warm smile on his face, "for his wonderful History project on Merlin and for being undoubtedly the sanest of the lot of us." Bill gave Ron a wink as the others clapped. "And, last but not least, to Ginny. For finally turning eight this month, and for loosing yet another tooth, thus completing her transformation into a fully fledged Hallowe'en pumpkin." Ginny giggle with glee from behind her mass of red hair. She really did look like a pumpkin.

"To the Weasleys!" cried Bill. "To the Weasleys!" came the firm response. Everyone clapped and cheered and took a big drink from their glasses. Ron had to hold his goblet with two hands as it was too big for only one. Everyone started chattering away once more as he set it back down on the table, and he started swinging his legs as he thought about whether or not he wanted some more chocolate butterballs. Ron liked it when Bill talked at the table; he always said clever things and made people laugh. He always made Ron feel special too.

Ron kicked his feet under the table; he could almost reach the floor now he was nine. Ginny was sitting opposite him - they often sat together at the table because the others would talk about boring things they didn't understand. When he and Ginny talked about getting a pack of dogs and what they would name them all, or when they talked about comic books and going to Hogwarts, Ron liked having a sister. But sometimes, when she asked 'why?' over and over again, or when she jumped on his bed, he didn't really like having a sister. That's why he liked being friends with Harry Potter, because he had a little sister too so he knew what it was like. He was also really good at Quidditch and had a really fast broom he always let Ron have a go on. Even if he didn't know what it was like to have lots and lots of brothers, Ron still really liked having him as a friend. Ron yawned so hard he couldn't see for a second. He rubbed his eyes and then reached over for some chocolate butterballs. They made your fingers all messy, but he didn't really care. He put one in his mouth and let it melt on his tongue. Sleepily, he gazed over at the

special clock on the wall, it was called the Weasley's Family clock, and it kept track of everyone and where they were. It took a moment for Ron to realise there was something wrong with the way it looked.

Normally, all the hands were at 'home' in the evening. During the day, his dad's hand would be on 'work', sometimes mum's would be on 'shopping', and during school time Percy's and Charlie's would be at 'school'. But now, slowly, like a seconds hand running smoothly round the edge, the hand that said 'Arthur' was moving. Ron frowned and looked at his dad; he wasn't going anywhere was he? Ron looked back at the clock.

The handle had stopped. Ron dropped the butterball he was holding. The hand now read 'mortal peril'. Ron knew what that meant, he had asked Bill about it once. Bill had said if the hand stopped there then that meant you were going to die. But he had also said that the hand never, ever stopped there. Ron swallowed hard. "Dad?" he said softly, but nobody heard him. He looked back at the clock, and slowly, just like his fathers', the handle that said 'Molly' was moving to the same place.

"Dad," said Ron a little louder. He was feeling scared now, he suddenly noticed just how dark the room was as he started breathing a little heavier.

Still nobody noticed him. "Dad!" he cried and stood up, knocking his chair back. He didn't take his eyes off the clock. Arthur Weasley frowned. "What is it Ron?" He looked to where his youngest son was staring. And froze. The hand that read 'Bill' had just stopped moving, resting in the same place as his parents. He stood up and knocked his chair back, just like Ron. "Everybody out, NOW!"

As Charlie's hand twitched and eased its way round the face, the Weasleys flew to their feet. "What to we do?" cried Mrs Weasley, looking at the clock in dread and gathering her daughter up into her arms.

"The fireplace!" yelled Mr Weasley, grabbing a number of his sons and pushing them through the door. Ron ran to do the same, but he stopped in his tracks as there was a tremendous crash from where the front door normally stood.

Bill grabbed Ron's hand. "Come on!" he cried, and sprinted to the door.

They stopped abruptly in the living room. Ron could feel panicky tears running down his face, but could still see clearly enough to know what was happening. A man was walking into the middle of the room. He wore black robes and his face was as white as milk. He was laughing as he came to a halt in front of them. "How thoughtful Arthur," he said wickedly, "you have placed all your family in one convenient place, much easier for me." He raised his wand, but Ron didn't see what happened. Bill, still holding onto him so tightly, flung himself and Ron onto Percy, knocking them into the kitchen. In the split-second it took him to roll to the left, dragging his younger brothers with him, a blast of green light exploded in the living room. Ron screamed, but Bill wasted no time in hauling him and Percy to their feet. "Run!" he cried, not looking back to where the rest of his family had fallen to the floor. Ron scrambled up, but another shot of green knocked him back down; Bill fell beside him, but Percy smacked into the wall and crumpled, hit with the same curse as the others. The man with the white face was standing behind them grinning. "Spirited, aren't you?" he called out to Ron and Bill, still under the table, unable to move fast enough to get away. Ron screamed again, Bill threw his arms around his smallest brother, and the whole world was suddenly filled with green light. And then everything was black and still.

### Harry and the Lasagne

I realised the time-lapse between our Harry disappearing and Other Harry fainting wasn't really explained in the text; if you think about what is said about 5 hours passes between fainting and disappearing, so this is a little scene to explain why Other Harry isn't tucked up in his bed at 12:30 when our Harry is breaking windows. Contains half a quote from Angel.

Harry stumbled through the fireplace at Godric's Hollow. He was very, very drunk. Katie Bell had invited him to her 18th Birthday bash at her house in Wrexham.well, he used the term house loosely, royal palace would probably be the better description. Anyway, she had invited him, where in turn he had been invited by a variety of girls (including both Cho Chang and friends) to drink a number of cocktails and other alcoholic beverages until he passed out on the floor.

He looked at his watch. After a moment of focusing he worked out it was definitely past midnight, definitely past his curfew, and most definitely past all hope of not being grounded. "Bugger," he said with feeling. "Hello Harry," came his mother's amused voice; she must have just walked through from the kitchen. Double bugger, thought Harry, now he was going to have to try and convince her he wasn't as Drunk as a Skunk in a Trunk. He - that rhymed. Don't giggle, he instructed himself severely. He didn't know how much good it did. "Hi mum!" he cried and waved. "Harry, how drunk are you," said Lily patiently. "No," said Harry, shaking his head with the conviction, "no drinking for Harry."

"Really?"

"Ya-huh, I'm not old enough to drink, so I'm not drunk." He thought about this logic, then nodded to affirm it. Lily laughed and shook her head.

"Okay trooper, would you like something to eat, I made lasagne and there's still some left."

Harry nodded and grinned. Oh yeah, he'd fooled her; he was the master of fibs, cover-ups, and all things untruthy. They walked into the kitchen where Harry sat down (with a little assistance from Lily) and she gave him a plate of cold pasta. Harry started jabbering about the party between mouthfuls; who was there, what they were wearing, who snogged who and who didn't, and most important, what other people drank and how drunk they got. Because Harry didn't drink. All of a sudden Harry felt very angry. or did he? Gagh - Tequila is officially evil, he thought. But the feeling came again, stronger, and with it came waves of sadness and despair. Oh Harry wasn't liking this at all. He stopped talking, "are you okay Harry?" asked Lily. But Harry didn't hear her.

An incredible sound of smashing glass and thunder and yelling filled his head, he covered his ears, but it didn't do anything. The hate was consuming, enveloping him, threatening to choke him. Pressing his eyes closed his head swam, but his vision seemed to clear. The thing was, he saw himself, cradling his head, gasping for breath. What was going on? Am I dying? he thought weekly. It was the last thing Harry thought before his vision blurred again, until finally everything went black.

## Draco Malfoy: Smart Arse Know-It-All

This scene was originally the end of Chapter Three, and is the alternate version of what is now the beginning of Chapter Four. I love this scene, but unfortunately Draco is far to cool and funny, he's more like Cassy Claire's or Maya's Draco, who is adorable. My Draco is closer to how he is depicted in JKRowling's books; a spineless git. As mentioned I re-jigged Chapter Three to change Draco's character, but this scene had to be reworked entirely. Here it is in its original form. The following contains a quote from 6 Feet Under, Lethal Weapon 4 and a reworking of a quote from Buffy.

"SARAH! " screamed Lily, and ran to the spot where they'd disapparated, "James, where did they go - what do we do?" James had backed into the wall in shock, hand over mouth, shaking. "Oh God, Sarah," he whispered. No one seemed to have an answer for his wife. "The Ministry-" he said suddenly, rushing into the living room, "we have to contact them - they'll help us-" But Sirius had another idea walking into the room. "You!" he shouted catching sight of Draco, "what have you done!" He grabbed hold of the boy's shoulders and banged him into the wall. "Hey!" cried Draco, " I've had enough crap this week, this is nothing to do with me - get off!" "She's only twelve, she's a little girl-" "Whoopee for her, you can still let me go," and he pushed Sirius off rather than waiting, "if you give me two seconds I'll explain." Draco had his audience back - Harry was thrilled. Just when he'd thought things were maybe going okay; that he, Harry Potter, The-Boy-Who-Attracted-Trouble-Like-A-Magnet, had made something right. It had all blown up in his face. He should have known better - that poor little girl. "Explain quickly boy," growled Sirius. "My name is Draco," he snapped, "and let's get one thing straight - I am not your enemy." He took centre-stage once more; James looked agitated - like he didn't have time for this, but Lily took his hand and he seemed to ease slightly. "The reason I'm here is nothing to do with Wormtail. As I've been explaining to Potter here, I'm a deputation from Freiheit, the Death Eater resistance movement." Remus nodded, "we've heard of it."

"Good, so you only need the gist - The Dark Lord's position has been compromised since his duel with Dumbledore, we've decided the time is right to take advantage of it, and to do that we need Potter's - Harry's help." Lily looked like she wanted to interrupt but James got there first.

"What do you mean Harry - what's he got to do with anything?" Draco arched an eyebrow. "You're not serious, don't tell me you don't know?" He was however met with blank stares, apart from Harry, but he didn't have the energy to contribute. "Yeah, okay people, this kind of stupidity is why we've been winning all these years - he's Harry Potter." Even shaking his hand in Harry's direction didn't get the desired response; Draco exhaled loudly. "Fine, children - why did you need a Secret Keeper fifteen years ago, since it's such a hot topic tonight."

The was a pause before Lily spoke; "Because You-Know-Who targeted me and James-" Draco rolled his eyes. "How you flatter yourselves - he wanted Harry - you were just annoying, and therefore a bonus hit. Harry's like a super-prodigy-genius type thing. I don't know the particulars, but Potter here is bad news for The Dark Lord."

There was a very loud silence. "Why then," said Remus slowly, "did He- Who-Must-Not-Be-Named stop looking for him - the threat on the Potters has been lifted for years." Draco shrugged. "We couldn't be bothered? I mean, there were a million other problems to be dealt with, we just came to the conclusion we'd obliterate him soon enough."

Thanks, thought Harry, nice to be important. "Harry can defeat You-Know-Who?" came Parvati's small voice. "Yes, quick aren't you?" was Draco's snide reply, "which in fact brings us to my next point, about what Wormtail said." "Don't call him that," said Sirius looking Draco in the eye, "that's our name-"

"Whatever," he cut in, "who cares, the point is Wormtail-" Sirius winced- "was right, he needs to redeem himself for blowing his cover, and The Dark Lord wants Potter, now more than ever - by taking that girl he assumes Harry'll do the hero thing and save her; Wormtail delivers Potter to his master - redemption achieved."

"Now more than ever - what do you mean by that?" Remus was doing a good job of keeping his head and asking the questions; James and Sirius looked wild and agitated, Lily close to tears still.

"Yeah - some evil plot to regain his strength, I think - I don't know; look, we want Potter to fight The Dark Lord before he gets his voodoo back, Wormtail's kidnapped that girl in hopes of luring him into our midst to achieve exactly that. You might as well come with me, try and get her back, duel The Dark Lord - whatever." Harry felt like Malfoy was giving him the option whether or not to play Quidditch tomorrow. "So this is all one big coincidence - Voldemort wants me and you just happen to show up." And I happen to drop by into your universe Harry added to himself. Malfoy blinked, "well, not entirely - we figured something like this would have to happen."

"What!" cried James.

"Well The Dark Lord wasn't exactly going to owl an invitation was he?" Malfoy seemed to have missed the point where he should have warned them about this little issue and was focusing on getting Harry to agree to his scheme still. "He was obviously going to have to force Harry to come to him. This doesn't change anything, it's just happened a bit sooner than later; if anything it means you'll have to come with me now. So come on."

"No," said James determinedly, "if anyone's going, it's me."

"And me," added Sirius and Lily in unison. Remus sighed; Draco looked ready to thump something; preferably a Potter of some description.

"Have you heard one word I've said?" He flung his arms out in frustration. "It has to be Harry - he's the one The Dark Lord needs for what ever it is he's doing, he's the key. Why do you think we attacked the school three years ago - why be that stupid? He wanted Harry; then because he's this huge pain in the arse, now because he wants to grind his bones to make his bread or whatever." Draco paused for breath, Harry pondered that he probably wasn't too far off with the bones idea, considering what Voldemort did to his own father's grave.

"And for another thing - you all work for the Ministry, right?" Malfoy took their silence as a yes. "The chances of you making it ten miles within our perimeter are so small they're amusing. You might as well show up with a brass band singing annoying Disney songs the amount of alarms that would sound."

"But Harry wouldn't - sound any alarms?"

"Not the way I'd take him." Draco grinned.

It wasn't that easy for Malfoy - son of Lucius Malfoy after all - to convince the Potters to let their only son run off to single-handedly rescue their only daughter, whilst simultaneously walking into certain death at the hands of You-Know-Who. They took a bit of getting used to the idea that Harry was potentially the saviour of the world. But hey, this was Malfoy; he always got what he wanted. Harry didn't say much. Though on the one hand, he wasn't exactly looking forward to facing Voldemort for the fifth time now was it? He wasn't sure if Tom Riddle counted as Voldemort or not - the giant snake was the most important part of that story as far as he was concerned. On the other hand, it was his duty to save the world. Duh.

In saying that though, he'd never really gone looking for trouble quite this obviously before. Just how many lives did Harry Potter have? "So you're saying just you and Harry are our only option," cried Sirius for the fourth time, "it's suicide!"

"I'm going to," came a voice from the couch. Everyone turned to look. Seamus had been quiet a long time; now he stood resolutely, and repeated himself. "I'm going to - I won't set any alarms off, I'm nobody, but I know a fair few hexes, I'm good with first-aid, and besides - I've known Sarah for years, I'm not just going to hang around here." Lily beamed at the young man, Remus looked dubious, and Draco - well.

"I don't think 'no' is a strong enough word, in fact, a world of 'no' isn't even going to cover that request."

"It wasn't a request Malfoy-

"It's not an option Finnigan."

"We're talking about a little girl, not you Malfoy, you're not the centre of the universe - other people exist!" He was right in Draco face now.

"Thanks for that, but unfortunately you're so incurably irritating Finnigan, all the insults in England won't get you to tag along."

"I'm from Ireland, you pluck, we don't know how to give up."

"Sod off!"

"Boys!" cut in Parvati as the adults, if possible, looked even more shattered, "we'll all go, you three and me."

"And me," said Hermione confidently, "I said I'd help you Harry and I will." Draco looked sick.

"Not just one moron now, oh no, four of them," he muttered as he threw himself down on an armchair, "Fine, I don't care, let's just go."

As the clock moved to midnight, Harry, Hermione, Seamus and Parvati made preparations to start their journey with Draco Malfoy; a prospect that would have been laughable to all of them just hours ago. They decided it would be best not to inform the Ministry, as chances were they would only make things worse. As the four teenagers gathered essentials together, the adults were left feeling somewhat redundant, sitting in the kitchen drinking tea, staring blankly at the walls.

Seamus and Parvati considered owling their parents, then decided against it - they would only worry more. Harry pulled together a bag of a few useful items, and whilst doing this found Sarah's wand lying on top of the piano. He thought for a moment, then returned to the living room where the others were waiting. "I want you to have this, just until we find Sarah," he told Hermione quietly, and gave her the wand. She was unsure, but Harry insisted. "You might need it, and when we find her, she'll want it back," he put it in her hand, and this time she took it. "Hurrah," cried Draco, currently sprawled out on the couch, "might we be leaving this millennium?" "Just a few more minutes," snapped Harry, and walked into the kitchen. "Um. Sirius, can I have a word?" His godfather looked up at Harry, then to James, then followed him out of the room. Harry led him up to his bedroom and closed the door. He was about to speak when Sirius beat him to it - "how did you know Harry?" "Know what?" he replied honestly. "About Peter."

"Oh," said Harry, "uh. Malfoy - said something, look it's not important now." He looked into the man's eye's - they were tired, "I need you to do something whilst we're gone. Remus can help too if you want, but not my parents, not at the moment. Sirius nodded, "okay Harry, anything to be useful." "I want you to research parallel universes." Harry suspected that wasn't what he'd been expecting. "Oh," was all he could manage. But he agreed eventually (with a few raised eyebrows) and they made their way downstairs once more. Almost at the bottom, Harry spotted a small family portrait hanging on the wall. It was recent, that's for sure, but also just - really nice. Harry took it off the wall, slipped the picture out of the frame and pocketed it. No one noticed. "Alright then Malfoy," he said as he picked up his bag, "lead the way."

## Ron's Dream

I felt the urge to note this down - as there's always two sides to a conversation :-)

Ron was exhausted. He hadn't slept much the last couple of nights. He walked wearily down the flight of stairs, hand tracing against the stone wall, deep shadows under his eyes heightened by the flickering torch light. Past curfew, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry was deathly silent. Ron knew he shouldn't be out, not only because he'd be skinned alive if anyone caught him, but because Harry had been wondering around in the dead of night when he'd disappeared. No one knew what had happened to him, or that it wouldn't happen again.

Ron felt his stomach clench at the thought of Harry. Where was he? He pulled a tapestry aside and dropped deftly down into the corridor, freezing a second to listen for any other sounds; there were none. He let the rough cloth swing heavily back into place. He stuck his hands in his pockets and carried on walking, conscious of his every move and sound. Without a cloak on the icy wind sweeping down the hallway went through him mercilessly, and he shivered until he ached. Approaching the common room, Ron greeted the Fat lady, a disapproving look in her eyes. Nevertheless, she swung open as he spoke the password ("cauldron cakes") and he clambered through. Shattered to the bone, he slumped down next to Harry. He looked more knackered than he did himself. "How you doing Harry mate?" he said looking up at the stars between the trees. Harry gave a hollow laugh, "you have no idea." Ron laughed with him. He noticed a rather spectacular sword attached to Harry's waist; it seemed familiar, but Ron couldn't pinpoint where he could possibly know it from.

"You'll be alright you know," he told his best friend, "you're doing the right thing, you all are."

"It doesn't make it any easier," pointed out Harry. "Yeah, well," said Ron, "you've done worse - a whole year of Lockhart's Defence Against the Dark Arts for one thing." Harry laughed again.

"Yeah, and Professor Trelawney's Divination." Ron grinned, a calm settling over him he hadn't felt in a long time. He looked over at Hermione across the pathway, who was still talking in a tired but quite

happy way with Parvati Patil.  
"It's too bad about Herm hey?"  
Harry shook his head, "I hope I did the right thing, telling her everything." "Are you mad?" cried Ron, honestly surprised, "of course you did, Hermione always wants to know everything about everything, and then she goes and looks it up in her definitive encyclopaedia to the world just to check she's got it perfect." He wasn't making that up; she really had one of those.  
"Yeah," agreed Harry, "I guess you're right."  
"I always am," gloated Ron.  
"Apart from Draco being the heir of Slytherin."  
"I believe that was your idea, not mine."  
"What about-"  
"Shutting up would be a good idea now."  
Laughing, Harry punched Ron light-heartedly on the arm. Ron, not standing for such violence, smacked him right back on the leg. Harry rubbed his head and laughed in defeat. "Well," said Ron, standing, "you'd better get going," he looked down at Harry. "Don't forget about me will you?"  
"I'd never forget about you, pillock," said Harry scornfully.  
"You need to wake up now, Harry."  
"Ron-"  
"Harry?"  
"Ron!"  
Ron snapped awake. Hermione was staring at him, her hand on his shoulder. "You were sleep talking," she said in a sympathetic tone. Ron sat up with a jolt. He was in the Gryffindor common room, curled up in one of the armchairs by the fire.  
"I just had the strangest dream," he said weakly to Hermione.